HISTORY • MEANING • MESSAGE

THE MIRACULOUS IMAGE OF OUR MOTHER OF PERPETUAL HELP

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THE MIRACULOUS IMAGE OF OUR MOTHER OF PERPETUAL HELP

Above the high altar of the church of Sant' Alfonso in Rome hangs a Madonna. It is a small picture, about twenty by sixteen inches; and the church which enshrines it is dwarfed by many of our American parish churches.

Yet no image of Our Lady is so popular or so widely known today as this little picture; none has been the instrument of so many miracles. It is both ancient and beautiful. The works of many famous and immortal artists can hardly be compared with it either in technique or in celebrity. It is the picture of Our Mother of Perpetual Help.

Thousands of authentic copies resembling the original, as far as human art can make them, in size and shape and manner of execution, and apparently endowed by God with a share in the miraculous power of the mother-picture, have reproduced Mary's Roman sanctuary in many churches and chapels. Other copies, not quite so accurate, are on countless altars, in countless homes.

You will find Perpetual Help in Abyssinia and in Zhitomar, Russia. You will discover Mary's picture in the Arctic Circle and in the humid jungles of South America.

France alone in 1902 had the picture of Perpetual Help exposed for public veneration in at least 12,000 churches and oratories. In 1868 copies of the picture were brought to the United States, one for the Redemptorist chapel at Annapolis, another for St. James Church in Baltimore. Since then, this picture has been introduced into several thousand churches and chapels and mission stations from Canada to the Gulf of Mexico, from Maine to California.

Besides these larger pictures, millions of smaller copies and millions of medals have brought Our Mother of Perpetual Help into homes. Books and pamphlets and periodicals in almost every language tell the story of Perpetual Help.

Most important of all, Our Mother of Perpetual Help herself, by her understanding sympathy and her prompt assistance in our endless needs, has won her way into our hearts. The entire history of the Perpetual Help picture is a record of miracles: cures of body and soul, temporal and spiritual favors without number. So true is this that the picture—and even copies of it—seems to be alive, a living

proof and witness that Mary is our true Mother and the dispenser of all the graces of God.

This is the story of the miraculous picture of Our Mother of Perpetual Help.

The Madonna of St. Luke

An old tradition points to St. Luke the Evangelist as the author of the first picture of the Madonna.

According to the legend, St. Luke painted his picture of Our Lady while she was still living on Mount Sion in Jerusalem. When she saw the beautiful picture of herself holding in her arms her divine Son, she blessed both the artist and his work. "My grace," she exclaimed, "will accompany it."

The record of the centuries has proved that Mary was not forgetful of this promise. So numerous were the miracles and favors granted by means of this picture that Pope Innocent III in 1207 stated that Mary's very soul seemed to have entered into her image, since it was so beautiful and so miraculous.

The earliest documentary evidence of this tradition is found in the writings of Theodorus Lector, a Greek Historian who lived about the year 500. Although most of his history has perished, some portions have been preserved by other historians, and one of these fragments, in the Church History written in the fourteenth century by Nicephorus Callistus, plainly talks of a picture of the Mother of God painted by St. Luke.

Another legend says that St. Luke painted more than one picture of Our Blessed Lady. When the apostles departed for their first missionary journey shortly after Our Lord's ascension, they naturally spoke to their new converts about the Blessed Virgin Mary. They told how God had chosen her to be His Mother and had given her a share in the work of our redemption; and they mentioned that Christ's Mother was still living. Of course all these new Christians wanted to see her in person, but only a few could make the long journey to Jerusalem or Ephesus, wherever she was staying. Later the apostles learned that St. Luke had painted a picture of Mary with the divine Child; and they then asked him to paint other copies so that they could show them to their converts and thereby satisfy their desire to see Mary.

Leader of the Way

When St. Luke completed his picture of the Virgin Mary, he sent it to his personal friend and patron, Theophilus, in his own native city of Antioch. Authors and artists in those days depended for their livelihood and popularity on the money and influence of some wealthy person who took an interest in the master and his work. St. Luke found such a patron and benefactor in Theophilus. To him he sent his Gospel and the book of the Acts of the Apostles—and his Madonna.

What Theophilus did with the picture is not known. Perhaps it graced some wall of his huge estate, where it was displayed for the admiration of his guests. Anyhow, there is no further record of the picture until the fifth century.

Toward the middle of that century, Eudocia, wife of the Emperor Theodosius II of Constantinople, while on a tour of the Holy Land, received the picture as a gift. At once she sent it, either from Antioch or from Jerusalem, to her sister-in-law St. Pulcheria, back in Constantinople.

From her private resources this noble virgin, St. Pulcheria, before her death in 453 had a large and ornate church erected as an appropriate shrine for St. Luke's Madonna, the church of Sancta Sophia. In the course of time this church, located at the outskirts of Constantinople near a busy highway, became known as the *Leader of the Way.*

Why it received this name is not certain, but several plausible explanations are offered. Best perhaps is this one, that in the vicinity of the church dwelt men who acted as guides, or leaders of the way, to the many pilgrims and tourists from distant lands who visited the city. The shrine was their "parish" church, the church of the guides. Another explanation is that the church was originally dedicated to the Guardian Angels, who serve as leaders and guides on the way to Heaven.

Whatever may have been the origin of this title, gradually it was applied to the picture as well as to the Church, and St. Luke's Madonna became known as the *Hodegetria,* which is Greek for *Leader of the Way.*

In this shrine the picture remained for a thousand years. Here it was venerated and honored by countless Christians—by kings and emperors, by saints and sinners, by rich and poor. The few incidents preserved by historians show that this period was marked by many striking miracles.

Several times the city of Constantinople was saved from destruction by the intervention of Mary through her picture. When the Saracens besieged the city in 718, the inhabitants flocked to Mary's Shrine and with devout and trustful prayer begged the Mother of God to spare them. A procession was formed, and Mary's picture was carried through the streets of the city down to the sea. There the picture was touched to the quiet waters. At once a wild and furious storm arose which demolished the entire Saracen fleet.

Other invaders tasted the same results. Time after time enemy troops surrounded the city but could advance no further; whenever any threat would hang over the city, the people would carry the picture in procession and the city would be spared.

Mary's readiness to help her children led some of them to a misguided devotion. In their enthusiasm they fell into superstition, adoring her as God, or at least believing that Mary's spirit had actually entered the picture and that the Holy Spirit overshadowed it. Perhaps in punishment for this excess the city was captured by the Venetians in 1204. To protect their Madonna the defenders placed the picture behind triple bars in the sacristy of the Basilica of Sancta Sophia; but despite the threat of excommunication by the Patriarch of Constantinople, the invaders stole the picture and carried it to the Church of the Pantocrator, where it remained till the Emperor Michael Palaeologus retook the city in 1261. Then it was restored to its shrine in a solemn procession, with the picture once again "leading the way."

This event led to the custom of holding such a procession annually on the Thursday of the fifth week in Lent, the anniversary of the Emperor Michael's successful return. The Madonna was carried to the imperial palace, where it was venerated by the Emperor and his household until shortly after Easter.

Another custom was also established of carrying the picture through the streets every Tuesday of the year. As Our Lady passed thus among her people, she turned her merciful eyes towards them, and many miracles were effected through her intercession. A traveler from Russia who attended one of these processions early in the fifteenth

century noted that four men were needed to carry the jewel-laden picture on its heavy throne, and often they were near exhaustion when they returned to the Church of the Hodegetria.

In 1453 Constantinople was once more besieged by the Mohammedans. For greater safety the picture of the Hodegetria was taken to a monastery called Chora. There the people flocked to pray, but this time their prayers seemed to fall on deaf ears. On May 30 or 31, 1453, the Sultan Mohammed II and his troops captured the city. In the pillage that followed four of his soldiers discovered the picture. Attracted by the rich jewels that adorned it, one of them took his sword and divided it into four pieces, while the soldiers cast lots for their portion.

There is a charming Polish legend, not very well known and certainly not well authenticated, that a valiant Polish prince had substituted a copy of Hodegetria for the original shortly before the fall of Constantinople. It was this that the Mohammedans destroyed, while the Polish prince smuggled the real Madonna into his homeland where it became famous as the Madonna of Czestochowa.

Whether the picture really perished or whether it was rescued does not matter. One thing is certain: its spirit and its miraculous power still live on in the picture of Our Mother of Perpetual Help. The title "Leader of the Way" has been replaced by a more expressive name, "Perpetual Help"; and the Tuesday processions have yielded to Tuesday novena devotions. Mary still lives among men, anticipating needs, saving, ministering, mothering—leading men along the way to heaven.

Comparisons and Contrasts

Although the original Hodegetria perished during the siege of Constantinople in 1453, hundreds of copies were then extant. Some of these have been preserved till the present day; and from them it is possible to piece together an accurate description of the mother-picture. For these pictures are expressions of Byzantine art. In fact they comprise a distinct group or family of pictures.

The principal mark of Byzantine art is synonymous with the entire spirit of the Orient: a reluctance to change with the changing times, an everlasting, almost monotonous sameness. For this reason to describe a copy of the Hodegetria is to describe the original.

A close and careful study of these pictures leads to this description of St. Luke's painting: The Blessed Virgin Mary, wearing a modest tunic that reaches to her neck and with a close fitting mantle covering her head, appears standing, with only the upper section of her body visible. She holds her head upright in queenly, majestic dignity. It is impossible to learn the color of her hair since it is hidden by a finely woven coiffure; but her large, attentive dark eyes are encircled by dark lashes. Her nose is straight and long, narrow and sharp, set in an oval face; and her mouth, capped by red lips, is small. The chin-point is round and unobtrusive.

In her left arm the Mother of God, with stately grace, carries her divine Son, while the slender tapering fingers of her right hand rest loosely on her breast. The Child, dressed in a long flowing tunic held in at the waist by a wide sash, has the appearance of a teacher or master. Three fingers of His right hand are joined and raised as if in blessing, or as a sign of power and authority. In his left hand he holds a scroll which apparently contains readings from Holy Scripture. Both the Mother and the Child are facing the one who views the picture. The impression produced is that of awe and reverence in the presence of supreme dignity and power. The beholder is tempted to exclaim: "Surely this is the Son of God and His glorious Mother!"

A glance at the picture of Our Mother of Perpetual Help will reveal many similarities to this description; but there are also a number of differences, some of them striking and remarkable. The entire theme of the Perpetual Help Picture is a portrayal of sorrow. Mary's head is not upright but is tilted maternally towards her child, a sign of her sympathy with him. Her hand does not repose on her breast, but loosely clasps the tiny hands of her Son. Christ has a look of fright and sorrow as He gazes into the future and sees the vision of His passion and death awaiting Him. In His haste to find refuge in the arms of His Mother, His sandal has come loose, and we see it falling from His foot. So close to her does He cuddle that the outline of His body blends into hers. Two angels in the upper corners of the picture carry in veiled hands the instruments of Christ's Passion.

The Perpetual Help Picture seems to belong to a distinct class of pictures, the "Passion" group; here majesty has given place to the tenderness of motherhood. There are, then, two styles of Byzantine Madonnas: the teaching type and the sorrowing or passion type. Since sorrow and tears have so prominent a part in man's life on earth, it is no wonder that such Passion pictures are far more numerous than the *Hodegetria*. Sometimes Mary is pictured without her Son, but

instead holding in her hands a crucifix which she is contemplating with visible sorrow. But most often she carries her Son in her arms. Tears seem to glisten in her eyes as she turns toward her beholders a glance of mingled reproach and appeal.

The Framework of Our Madonna

The Perpetual Help Picture gives at least a shadowy summary of Mary's lovable attractiveness. In it can be discovered the fingerprints of God's master hand, the sketch and outline of what His love has done for His Mother and for us. Much of this is clear to even a casual observer of the picture; far more is revealed by further thought and study. A detailed description of the features of Perpetual Help Picture will, therefore, be helpful both to increase our appreciation of this masterpiece and to deepen in our hearts devotion towards Our Savior and our Blessed Mother.

The first thing that strikes one upon examining the picture is its unusual style. We Americans, accustomed to what is called modern art with its unlimited freedom, are surprised at the sedateness, the regularity, the lack of background and perspective in this Madonna. Even if we are acquainted with the works of the greatest artists, we find nothing resembling the Perpetual Help Picture.

The picture is a product of Byzantine art. This style of art has as its underlying motif or theme to teach a lesson, to embody an ideal, to point out a doctrine, rather than to portray persons and objects in their natural surroundings. For this reason there is ordinarily no scenery in a Byzantine picture, but merely an unadorned background, such as a field of gold. As a result the attention of the beholder is taken up with the persons or objects alone and with the moral they are intended to convey. This also produces a sense of the supernatural, as if the entire picture were something from the other world.

Style is not the only mark which distinguishes Perpetual Help from other Madonnas. For one thing, our picture is surprisingly small. It measures approximately twenty inches in height by sixteen in width. Furthermore, the picture is not painted on canvas nor on a wall like a mosaic, but on a piece of nut-wood about half an inch thick, reddish in hue, and cut from a tree near a knot. It is, in other words, a "portable" picture; it can be carried from place to place without inconvenience or serious damage.

The technique or manner in which the picture was painted is likewise different from that of other masterpieces. The pigment used for coloring the picture was mixed with egg-white or lime or some other glutinous substance to give it binding force and durability. This paint was daubed on to the wood, not applied with a brush, thereby increasing the beauty of the picture.

These elements comprise the framework of the world-famous Madonna of Perpetual Help. Insignificant in size, it better fits the humility of the Handmaid of the Lord. Its manner of execution gives it simplicity and grace. Painted in an ageless style, it fulfills Mary's prophecy that all generations will sing her praises. It can be claimed by no particular nation or era because Mary is the Perpetual Help of all men at all times.

Thousands of authentic copies of the Perpetual Help Picture have been distributed to churches throughout the world. There are countless more copies which have departed in some way from this original. They are, for instance, larger in size, printed on paper or painted on canvas or elaborately fashioned in bronze. There are other differences, too. Some artists have injected a modern touch into their copies, making Our Lady a placid, smiling Virgin or a buxom, full-faced Madonna hardly resembling the solemn, tender, sorrowing Mother portrayed in the original picture. All shades and tints of red and blue and green have been blended into tunics and mantles and angels' wings. The gold background ranges from yellow ochre to a drab indescribable tan.

Despite the minor changes and striking variations which give originality to these copies, we recognize in them the Perpetual Help Picture.

The Mother

Artistic masterpieces are best viewed with the aid of a guidebook. Otherwise many details escape the eye of even a trained observer. The meaning and interpretation of a picture become more clear if one faces the work with at least some knowledge of the skill and aim of the artist, together with an acquaintance with the type of art employed and the method in which it is realized. Often insignificant lines and shadows convey a concept hidden to an amateur.

For this reason it is best to approach the Picture of Our Mother of Perpetual Help with a knowledge of the elements and features it contains. This knowledge we shall now endeavor to give.

The background of Perpetual Help picture is conspicuous because it is unusual. We are accustomed to a more ornate scene than a simple, unadorned field of gold. This, however, is typical of Byzantine art and fits most appropriately the theme of our picture. In early times, especially in the era preceding and following the earthly life of Christ, gold was the symbol of divinity. When the Roman emperors set themselves up to be worshipped as gods, gold was what they chose as the outward mark of their self-appointed divinity. A more fitting background for a representation of the one true God and His Mother could hardly be found.

In the middle ages gold took on a symbolism appropriate to the Perpetual Help picture. For gold was to the pious Christian a figure of heaven, the City of Gold described by St. John in the book of the Apocalypse—and Mary is the Gate of Heaven.

The persons portrayed in the Perpetual Help picture are identified by Greek letters and initials; they are: The Mother of God; Jesus Christ; the Archangel Michael; the Archangel Gabriel.

Undoubtedly the center of interest and attention in the picture is the figure of Mary, the Mother of Perpetual Help. She is shown in bust or half figure and in a standing position. She seems somewhat tall. Her head is tilted with maternal affection towards the Child whom she holds on her left arm. Mary's eyes are fixed not on her Child nor on the instruments of the passion which two angels seem to hold out to Christ, but she gazes towards those who behold the picture. With a look of mingled sorrow and love she invites all to place their confidence in her.

The arms and hands of the Mother of Perpetual Help at once catch our attention. With her left arm, the arm we usually consider weak, she supports her Child, the Redeemer, the Creator of the Universe. So closely does she clasp Him to her bosom with her left hand that the lines of His body blend into hers, so that it is impossible to separate Mother and Child without destroying the picture. The fingers of her left hand are visible as she holds her Child. Her right hand assumes the attitude which early Christian artists frequently used to signify the idea of prayer. The fingers are stiff and straight, resisting her natural inclination to clasp her Child's hands, while

Christ's two hands rest loosely on her right hand in such a way that He could remove them at will.

On Mary's forehead is a simple eight-pointed star of gold, composed of a plus sign superimposed upon a multiplication sign. This should not be confused with the four-pointed ornamental cross which appears to the left of the star, and which was probably not on the original picture but added by a later artist. Nor is this the same as the elaborate golden star seen on present copies of the picture and covering the original eight-pointed star. This decorative star is a jewel attached to the picture when it was solemnly crowned in 1867.

The eight-pointed star is a witness to the antiquity of the Perpetual Help picture. Similar adornments are found on a second century painting of Mary with her Child in the Catacombs of St. Priscilla in Rome, as well as on a fourth or fifth century representation of the adoration of the Magi. A mosaic arch in the Basilica of St. Mary Major in Rome, dating to the fifth century, also has such a star on the forehead of the Virgin Mother.

Around Mary's head is a golden nimbus or halo, plain and simple, while Christ's is decorated with a cross to show His dignity and office.

Mary's tunic, visible at the neck and at the sleeves, is red in color and fringed with golden stripes. The inner veil or coiffure which fits tightly about her head and holds back her hair is of a greenish hue. Covering her head and draped over her shoulders hangs a cloak or mantle of blue.

Shades and shadows were not employed to give depth or perspective to the Perpetual Help picture. Other samples of Byzantine art prove that this technique was unknown or at least never used. Instead, the folds of the garments are indicated by golden lines.

In this picture Mary is depicted in such a manner as to be the model and inspiration of all men. Her simple charm and beauty is a magnet drawing all men to seek her help in every trial and need. She is dressed modestly to remind our modern world of a virtue which is being abandoned and forgotten, but without which we can never attain to true happiness. On her arm she carries her divine Son, to show that motherhood still remains woman's greatest privilege. On her brow shines the star of virginity, the invitation to a life of holiness and perfection in the service of God. Towards us she turns her eyes, because our sins are responsible for the scene of sorrow portrayed before our eyes.

The Child

A picture of Our Lady would hardly be complete unless it included her Son. For Christ is at the same time the source and the measure of Mary's power and grandeur.

The first feature which comes to our notice as we study the image of Christ in the Perpetual Help picture is His look. It is directed neither towards the beholder of the picture as is Mary's nor towards the angels who seem to frighten Him with a foreboding of His bloody and bitter passion. But His wide open eyes are gazing fixedly into space, and we can easily imagine His brow furrowed into a frown. On his face are signs of attentive and serious contemplation.

This is to show that the picture is not intended to portray some real event but is rather a "dream picture" of the Passion. At all times, from the very first moment of His earthly life, Christ foresaw in clearest detail all the anguish and suffering of His Passion. With the prophet He could exclaim at any and every moment of His life: "My sorrow is always before my eyes."

But whenever this realization seemed to overwhelm Him, He knew that He could find refuge in the loving embrace of His Mother. Her sympathy would comfort and strengthen Him. So quickly did He run to her arms, and so tightly did He press Himself to her, that the sandal of His right foot became loose, and we can see it falling to the ground. His legs are crossed to show that He nestles as closely as possible to the body of His Mother. His right foot is pushed out by the pressure of the left. In the original picture of Perpetual Help one can see the folds of skin.

Another remarkable element in the picture of Christ is the fact that His body seems very small. Without being in the least degree repulsive or unattractive, His body is tiny. Perhaps the principal explanation is that this was necessary for artistic reasons. If Christ were larger, the entire picture would be out of proportion, and the outline of His body would no longer be one with that of His Mother. To picture Him as younger would weaken the significance of the picture; Christ is a model for all men. A child of any age runs to its mother's arms when frightened or afraid.

Christ's fingers hold His Mother's right hand, yet they rest quite loosely upon it. In this lies another lesson. Though Mary is His

Mother, He is her God. To Him she owes all her graces, all her dignity and power, and He could limit or recall these at His good pleasure. History, however, and the experience of the centuries assure us that Mary will always sway Christ's hands.

The features of the Child bear close resemblance to those of His Mother. He, too, has a full oval face, curved eyebrows, eyes opened widely and attentively, a long pointed nose, small mouth, and slender tapering fingers. His head is covered with thick curly auburn hair and is surrounded by a halo containing a cross, the sign of His divinity and the emblem of His office as our Redeemer.

The Child is clothed in a green tunic, with full and flowing sleeves, held in at the waist by a reddish sash. Draped over His right shoulder and covering most of the body is a yellowish-brown mantle. Golden lines are used to show shadows, and also add to the beauty of the costume. Tradition maintains that Mary herself made Christ's simple, homespun garments. There is also a legend that the tunic He wore as a Child miraculously grew with Him as He advanced in years, and that this was the seamless garment for which the soldiers cast lots.

The Angels

Angels play a prominent role in the drama of Our Savior's earthly life. An angel announced the birth of the precursor, St. John the Baptist, and brought to Mary the glad tidings that the Redeemer had chosen her as his Mother. When St. Joseph wondered at Mary's miraculous pregnancy, an angel was sent to clear away his doubts. The shepherds who watched their flocks near Bethlehem on the night that Christ was born were greeted by an angel choir and sent by an angel to visit their new-born King. When Herod threatened the life of the Savior, an angel commanded the flight into Egypt and directed the time of the return. After Christ was tempted in the desert by a fallen angel at the very outset of his public life, a host of heavenly spirits ministered to their God. An angel was sent by the Eternal Father to comfort the sorrowing Christ in the garden of Gethsemane, while a single word would have brought twelve legions of angels to rescue Him from His captors. Angels witnessed His resurrection in the silent hours of Easter morning and then stood guard at His tomb.

Since angels are so familiar to Christians and so bound up with the life of Christ, it is not strange that many Byzantine pictures of the Madonna and Child also portray angels.

On the Perpetual Help picture two angels may be seen, one on either side of Our Lady's head. Both may be identified from the Greek inscriptions above them. The one to the left as you view the picture is the Archangel Michael; the other is the Archangel Gabriel. Both of them are clothed in purple or violet tunics. Gabriel's mantle and hand-veil are of this same color, while Michael's are green. The wings of both are green, streaked with gold.

In order to show the great reverence due to the instruments of Our Savior's passion, the angels are carrying them in veiled hands. Michael bears the urn which contained the vinegar or gall mixed with myrrh offered to Our Lord by the soldiers before He was nailed to the cross. In the urn, apparently, are the lance and a reed topped by a sponge.

Gabriel carries the cross. It is of a peculiar shape, different from that to which we are accustomed. With it he holds what seem like four nails.

Even an inexperienced observer is struck at once by the small stature of the angels. Their bodies seem almost too diminutive to be real and are out of proportion with the rest of the picture. No doubt the artist intended to show by this that an angel is a spirit and in reality has no body. Besides, the angels are not the principal characters of the picture, and their smallness and apparent insignificance serve to enhance the grandeur and greatness of the Mother and Child.

These two angels were chosen with purpose to appear on the picture of Our Mother of Perpetual Help. From earliest times Michael, the leader of the angelic hosts, was looked upon as the protector of the Jewish people. When Christ founded His Church, Michael was commissioned as its special guardian. His office was, and is, to ward off the attacks of Satan, so that the gates of hell may never prevail against the beloved Spouse of Christ. Hence, he is in a particular way associated with Christ and His passion. On the sleeve of Michael's tunic may be seen three gold chevrons or "stripes," similar to the distinctive marks worn by officers in an army. By these stripes his position as Commander-in-chief of the heavenly armies is designated. Moreover, he carries the lance, symbolic of his office as protector of the Church.

The Archangel Gabriel is intimately connected with Christ's Incarnation and passion. He was the angel who foretold to the prophet Daniel the time of the Savior's coming on earth. To Zachary in

the temple he announced the conception of St. John the Baptist, the herald of the Messias. He was likewise the messenger chosen by God from the myriad choirs of angels to bring to the Blessed Virgin Mary the glorious tidings that God wished to take flesh through her. Tradition has always acclaimed Gabriel as the special guardian angel of Our Lady, and therefore he is fittingly pictured at her side.

Sorrow: The Key to Our Madonna

The event portrayed by the Perpetual Help picture is as familiar to most of us as the picture itself.

As if to impress the story upon us, to make sure that we would miss no important detail, some "sister" pictures of Perpetual Help—copies which resemble it in almost every feature—carry inscriptions telling the secret of the picture. On a few such copies are found in Latin the words: *Behold Thy Son! Behold Thy Mother!* These words take us to the foot of the cross on Calvary where Christ, as His last will and testament, gave us as children to Mary, and gave her to us as Our Mother of Perpetual Help.

Other copies carry a longer inscription, sometimes in Greek and sometimes in Latin, giving the signification of the picture rather completely. This is in the form of a quatrain or poem of four verses, though the poetry is far less perfect than the picture. The following lines are a literal English translation.

"He who first brought to the Most
Pure Lady the news of joy
Now shows beforehand the signs of
the Passion;
But Christ, clothed with mortal flesh
And fearing death, is frightened at
the vision."

Here in a few concise words is the story of the Perpetual Help picture. Two Archangels—although only Gabriel is mentioned in the poem as the messenger of the Annunciation—come from heaven carrying reverently in veiled hands the cross and nails, the spear and the lance. Christ, who had taken upon Himself our entire human nature with all our emotions and weaknesses except sin alone, is frightened at seeing such things. He had feasted on the beauties of heaven, and now He is brought to a realization of why He is on

earth—to suffer and die for us. Trembling He becomes afraid and seeks for refuge where He knows it can certainly be found, in the arms of His Mother.

Again, the Perpetual Help picture is a foreboding of the events which took place in the Garden of Olives when Our Savior suffered His sweat of blood and allowed Himself to be taken captive. Some artists even claim that it was the principal intention of the author of Perpetual Help picture to show the agony of Gethsemane as happening during the childhood of Our Savior. Here just as in the Garden, He trembles at the vision of His torments. During the night of His agony He sought for comfort from His apostles but He found them sleeping. In our picture He finds refuge in the waiting arms of His loving Mother.

Christ, however, did not suffer alone. Always at His side as the companion of His sorrows we discover His Mother. She knew that we were responsible by our sins for His passion and death, yet her glance towards us is one of mercy and pity. It is a look of kindliness and love. Her eyes are the eyes of mercy that we beg her to turn towards us every time we recite the "Hail, Holy Queen."

Mary as well as Christ suffered in advance the bitterness of the passion. While Christ grew to boyhood and then to manhood, Mary saw Him on the cross and herself standing beneath that cross.

Shortly after Christ's birth the aged prophet Simeon, while holding the Infant Savior in his arms, promised Mary a life filled with suffering. "Thy own soul a sword shall pierce," he prophesied. The Perpetual Help picture points out the sword which pierced her heart —the instruments of Christ's passion and death.

This idea is strikingly conveyed by a Russian picture of the Presentation of the Child Jesus in the temple, a picture which dates back to the early seventeenth century. In it we see pictured St. Joseph carrying a cage containing two turtle-doves, the ransom offering for the Savior. Our Blessed Lady stands beside Simeon, who has the Child in his arms. In the background is the holy prophetess Anna, who had dedicated her life to the service of the temple, and who also recognized Christ as the Redeemer as He lay in Simeon's embrace. In the upper left-hand corner of this picture, there is a small image of the Madonna and Child, with angels carrying the cross and nails and other symbols of the passion—a picture similar in every detail to Perpetual Help. Thereby we are shown in an excellent way the close

and intimate connection between Mary's sword of sorrow and our picture.

Historical Sources

There remains now to consider the story of Our Madonna, the history of its beauty and of its power. We wonder about the origin of the picture, when and by whom it was painted. We should like to know how it came to be enshrined in Sant' Alfonso, the Redemptorist Church in Rome. All this makes a story more thrilling than a romance or a tale of adventure, because we realize that it is the biography of Our Lady living through the centuries, fulfilling her prophecy that all generations will call her blessed.

The story of the picture of Our Mother of Perpetual Help was first told on a large parchment affixed to a wooden tablet which hung for many years in the choir of San Matteo's Church in Rome—the first Roman shrine of Perpetual Help—and later was fastened to the picture itself. This document, written in both Latin and Italian, gives a history of the arrival of the picture in Rome and its solemn enthronement in the Augustinian Church of San Matteo. The original document, composed perhaps in 1499, does not seem to be extant. However, copies of it were discovered some years ago in several manuscripts of the Vatican library, and they help to correct some of the prevalent inaccuracies about the early story of the Perpetual Help picture.

There are also other historical sources from which we learn details about our Madonna. Mention of the picture is made in a *Guidebook to the City of Rome,* a manuscript written in 1518 by the Franciscan Friar Mariano de Firenze, but not published until 1931. A famous sermon on the Perpetual Help picture, giving many details of its history, was preached to a group of pilgrims at San Matteo's church by the Jesuit Father Concezzio Carocci on August 31, 1715. This priest visited all the principal shrines of Our Lady in Rome and at each of them delivered a sermon full of thought and piety. Later, in 1729, all these sermons were published in a book with the lengthy title: *A Guide for Pilgrims in their Visits to the Most Renowned Pictures of the Blessed Virgin Mary in Rome.* It is because of this book and this sermon, based on the authentic document beside the picture, that the Perpetual Help picture hangs in the Church of Sant' Alfonso today.

The Historical Document

"How the picture of the Virgin Mary came to this Church of San Matteo.

"A certain merchant, a native of Crete, stole this picture of the Virgin, which had worked many miracles in a church on that island. With the picture concealed among his wares, he boarded a ship and set out to sea. When a great storm arose, the sailors began to despair of their safety. Though they knew nothing about the picture, they prayed very fervently to God and to the Virgin to be saved. God heard their prayers.

"A year later the merchant came to Rome, bringing the picture with him. There he was stricken with a malignant disease. Immediately he called to his bedside a Roman friend and asked him to care for him. The Roman took the merchant into his own home and did all he could to help him, but the disease continued to grow more violent.

"Finally the dying man called his friend and with tears in his eyes, begged him to fulfill his one last request. When the Roman promised to do whatever he asked, the merchant divulged the entire story of the picture: how he had stolen it from a church where it was famous for miracles, how it could now be found among his effects. 'Because of this, I beg you to put it in some church where there is a place more appropriate for such a picture.'

"After the merchant's death, the picture was found among his belongings, but the wife of the dead man's friend prevailed upon her husband by her entreaties not to take the picture out of the house. Instead she placed it in her bedroom and kept it there for nine months.

"The Blessed Virgin, however, counseled the Roman in a vision not to keep the stolen picture, but to put it in some more honorable place. He neglected to do so. Some time later the Virgin returned and advised him as before, that he should not keep the picture in his house. He paid no attention to this request. Finally, the Virgin admonished him again, adding that if he did not take the picture to some church, he would die a miserable death. Now the Roman was frightened; the next morning he told the whole story to his wife and pleaded with her to donate the picture to some church. She replied

that she was amazed he could make such silly statements. 'Why, I am not an infidel but a Christian! Besides, we are not the only ones who keep a picture like this in their home. No Christian is so wicked as not to have a picture of the Virgin, or of Christ crucified, or some other picture of this kind in his house!' The Roman listened to his wife's persuasive words.

"The Virgin appeared a fourth time to the Roman and said, 'Behold, several times I have warned you, and even tried to frighten you with threats, so that you might remove me from this place; but you would not listen to me. It is now necessary that you depart first so that I may thereafter find a more suitable abode.' At that moment he was struck with a horrible disease and died.

"The Virgin then appeared in a vision to the Roman's six-year-old daughter and told her: 'Go and admonish your mother and your grandfather, and say to them: *Holy Mary of Perpetual Help* commands you to take her out of your house; otherwise you will all die at once.' The girl narrated the apparition to her mother, and the mother began to tremble, because she, too, had had a similar vision. She now realized that she had been the cause of her husband's death, and she began to weep. At the same time she firmly resolved to remove the picture from her home.

"But a neighbor woman, investigating her loud cries and tears, prevailed upon her to keep the stolen picture. 'You are mistaken,' the neighbor said. 'It is foolish to believe such things. The Virgin is in heaven and does not care what we do with her painted pictures here below!' For some reason she continued to heap insulting slurs upon the picture. When this neighbor returned home that evening she was stricken with a serious disease, but on making a solemn promise to the Queen of Heaven, she was cured.

"Finally the Blessed Virgin appeared for the second time to the little girl, commanding her to tell her mother to place her picture between St. Mary Major and St. John Lateran, in a church dedicated to St. Matthew the Apostle. The mother did as she was told, and sent for the Augustinian Fathers, who were in charge of that church. In the presence of the clergy and a large gathering of people they removed the picture to St. Matthew's Church. On that same day the first public miracle occurred. A man so paralyzed in his right arm and side that he could scarcely move, humbly recommended himself to God and the Virgin, promised a votive offering and was instantly cured.

"In this manner the picture of the most Blessed Virgin was enthroned in the above-mentioned church of St. Matthew the Apostle, on the 27th of March, 1499, in the pontificate of our most holy Father and Lord in Christ, of our Lord Pope Alexander VI, in the seventh year of his pontificate."

Madonna of the Esquiline

On the slope of the Esquiline, one of the seven hills on which the city of Rome is built, on a site hallowed by both pagan and Christian tradition, stood the church of St. Matthew the Apostle—San Matteo's.

Mary's chosen sanctuary, small and unobtrusive and far from the heart of the city in the fifteenth century was nevertheless a place of historical importance.

Christian antiquity cherishes fond memories of the Esquiline Hill. Its soil was sprinkled and sanctified by the blood of martyrs, valiant men and women who did not hesitate to witness by their deaths the truth of Christ's own suffering and death. The Emperors Titus and Trajan erected their "Baths" on the hill. Nearby, in a market place, was an execution slab which vies in infamy with the guillotine of the French Revolution. There countless martyrs laid down their lives, while the Roman gentry on their way to or from the Baths, looked on and cheered.

According to sixteenth century authors who wrote the story of the picture of Our Mother of Perpetual Help, the Church of St. Matthew was erected on the traditional site of the paternal home of St. Cletus, the third Pope.

As early as the end of the fifth century, Rome possessed a church dedicated to St. Matthew, and undoubtedly this was on the site of the later San Matteo's which was privileged to house the picture of Perpetual Help. The church is always referred to as "most ancient," and there is no record of any other "title" or parish erected in Rome in honor of St. Matthew, except the tiny church on the sloping side of the Esquiline. This church, or at least another with the same name and built on the same site, was located between the Basilica of St. Mary Major, at one end of the Esquiline, and that of St. John Lateran, on the other end. This was the shrine chosen by Mary herself for her picture.

Many visitors to the church went away calling Mary the Madonna of San Matteo's. Others, interested enough to read the inscriptions about the church or the documentary account of the picture's history hanging beside the Madonna, knew her by her self-imposed title, Holy Mary of Perpetual Help. We could give her another name, the Madonna of the Esquiline, for not only the church of St. Matthew but the entire hill is consecrated to Mary by history and tradition.

Their Mother's Keeper

About the twelfth century, when the Church of St. Matthew had a reputation for antiquity, it was given to the custody of the order of Crossbearers or "Cruciferi," who followed the rule of St. Augustine and claimed as their founder the third Pope, St. Cletus. The order was at that time engaged in conducting hospices or guest houses for pilgrims. It had, however, received its name from the fact that its members would march to a war or to a crusade against the infidels in company with the nobles and leaders, carrying a cross before the group and exhorting the entire company to patience, tolerance and veneration for the Holy Cross. Thereby they became an organized brigade of army chaplains. But when, at the close of the Crusades, wars became petty individual family frays, the order was without a reason for existence, and consequently its monasteries declined. Later Pope Pius II allowed the members to wear a blue monastic habit and a silver cross, and to establish pilgrim homes and hospitals.

For two centuries a community of these blue-hooded friars at the Hospice of San Matteo housed and fed pious pilgrims and not-too-pious vagabonds, nursing them in sickness, burying their dead and performing other corporal and spiritual works of mercy. The Hospice and Church of San Matteo remained under their direction until the middle of the fifteenth century. Then the Crossbearers, destined for suppression by the Pope, yielded the church and surrounding property to the Augustinian Fathers. This took place in 1455.

San Matteo's was in Augustinian custody for more than twenty years before Pope Sixtus IV, in 1477, permitted a canonical community to be formed. The first prior was Friar Bartholomew of Calesio, and his successor was Friar Stephen of Genazzano, who received the Perpetual Help picture in 1499.

If Friar Stephen had possessed the gift of prevision, he would have foreseen a glorious future for his little church because of its new

treasure, and he might also have glimpsed at least one of the reasons why the Augustinians were chosen as the Madonna's keepers.

On July 1, 1517, Pope Leo X created thirty-one new Cardinals. Among them was a renowned Augustinian monk, Aegidius of Viterbo, who was authorized by the Pope to consider San Matteo's as his titular church. At once, with the munificence associated with his new rank and dignity, he spent money lavishly to improve the shrine of Our Lady of Perpetual Help.

Meanwhile in another corner of the world, another Augustinian was setting out on a course which would soon lead not only an entire nation but part of the world from fidelity to the Catholic Church and from devotion to Mary. Friar Martin Luther of the Monastery in Wittenberg, Germany, on October 31, 1517, affixed to the door of the cathedral in that city a series of propositions or theses which would eventually lead to that separation from the Church known as the Protestant Revolt or the so-called Reformation.

It may have been to offset the shame and disappointment and insecurity which would come to their Order as a result of this one monk's disastrous apostasy that the Augustinians received, in close succession, three distinct and famous Madonnas. One of these was the Perpetual Help picture. Another was the picture of Our Lady of Good Counsel.

This Madonna was a mural which, in 1484, was miraculously lifted, plaster and all, from the wall of a church in Scutari, Turkey, and transported through the air to Genazzano in Italy where it has hung in the air, without visible support, ever since. The third picture was a copy of St. Luke's famed *Hodegetria* which a Roman nobleman brought, in 1482, from St. Sophia's Church in Constantinople and donated to the Church of St. Augustine in Rome. Like the other two, this picture also carried a reputation for miracles and bore the title: *Mary, the Virgin of Virgins.*

As the years went by, San Matteo's continued to prosper. In 1658, due to the cruel persecution of Oliver Cromwell, Lord Protector of England, whose few years of high office were spent in torturing and persecuting the Irish, a group of refugee Irish Augustinians took over San Matteo's. But when Cromwell died that same year, most of the Irish returned to their homeland rather than learn a new language and new customs. They restored the church and monastery to their Italian brethren, but not without leaving a reminder of their own fame as citizens of the Isle of Saints. For an Irish lay brother who

remained behind, Brother Donough or Frater Donatus, died at San Matteo's in 1700 with the reputation of sanctity.

From 1661 till 1739 the Church was cared for by a community of Augustinians from Santa Maria Novella in Perugia. These took possession after the departure of the Irish and retained it until the Irish once again came to Rome.

In 1739 the Irish Augustinians resumed charge of San Matteo's, this time by a special invitation. When the exiled Stuarts, the Catholic English royal family exiled from their rightful throne and country because of their religion, wanted an English-speaking clergy to care for their spiritual needs during their sojourn in Rome, the Irish Augustinians were assigned to this task, with headquarters at San Matteo. There they remained, adding to their number Italian postulants, until the destruction of San Matteo's by the French at the end of the eighteenth century.

At Home With the Madonna

The simplicity of Our Lady shines forth not merely in her personal life but also in what may be called her public life—in the world's acclaim of her greatness. When men erect shrines in her honor, they make them majestic and magnificent, while Mary herself chooses sites as rough and unimposing as the stable of Bethlehem or her home at Nazareth.

Our Lady selected not only the site but the actual edifice which was to house her favorite Madonna of Perpetual Help, and her choice was in keeping with her humility. San Matteo's was a very diminutive church, about seventy-five feet long and thirty-five feet wide. There for three centuries, from 1499 till the destruction of the church by the French in 1798, the picture hung in Mary's self-appointed shrine.

Situated in an obscure corner of the Eternal City, San Matteo's was in a barren and desolate region. Its only companions and nearby neighbors were a few old churches and monasteries as small as itself, some vineyards, and the crumbling ruins of the baths of Trajan. Until 1873, long years after the church had been levelled to its foundation, no other buildings were erected in that immediate vicinity. Adjacent to the small church with its graceful, sloping roof and artistic belfry was the monastery in which the Augustinian monks lived, but the size of its cells and the simplicity of its furnishings matched the poverty of the district.

The rough-hewn stone exterior of the church and its bricks of baked Italian clay gave an added reason for wondering why Mary should want to live within. After San Matteo's had been made a Cardinal titular church, its patrons spent freely to decorate and repair the church but apparently none of them enlarged it. They also caused pictures of Our Lady, copies of Perpetual Help, to be painted outside the church and on the garden walls, perhaps to lure pilgrims to visit the shrine, and they furnished the interior in a manner becoming to the House of God.

Within the church were five altars—four of them in alcove chapels, two on each side of the high altar. These small side altars were without altar stones, because the custodian of the church feared that such treasures would be stolen. It is not surprising to find such precautions in so forsaken a region. Contemporary reports tell us that pilgrims were attracted by the splendid golden tabernacle where the Blessed Sacrament was kept and by the elaborate shrine of Perpetual Help. Mary's picture, framed between two ornately carved columns of black Carrara marble, rested for a long while above the white-marble high altar, though at various times during these three centuries it was placed, according to the whims of the Cardinal patrons, in one of the side chapels. Beside the altar and the picture were souvenirs of the many miracles Our Lady of Perpetual Help had obtained in behalf of her children and clients: discarded crutches and braces and walking sticks, accounts of sudden cures written on costly parchment, graphic pictures and portraits describing Mary's mercies, jewelry and golden trinkets offered as tokens of gratitude, tender notes of thanks for favors received.

When the Perpetual Help picture came to San Matteo's a little road, the present Via Merulana, hardly wider or more comfortable than a footpath, passed in front of the church. It was furrowed by the wheels of wagons and stamped by many feet. On rainy days it was impassable; on dry days it was intolerably dusty. On the occasion of the great jubilee of 1575, however, Pope Gregory XIII turned this into a spacious and splendid highway to facilitate travel between St. Mary Major's and St. John Lateran's, both of which jubilee pilgrims had to visit in order to gain the indulgence. Via Merulana, therefore, came to be called Via Gregoria (or more correctly, Via Gregoriana) in honor of its papal builder, but its original name soon returned. In modern Rome San Matteo's would be located at Via Merulana and Via Alfieri, in the direction of St. John Lateran's and several blocks distant from the present shrine at Sant' Alfonso.

From Near and Far

For three centuries, from 1499 till 1798, the Church of San Matteo in Rome held its place as one of the most important pilgrimage sites in Rome, if not in the world, because it contained the treasured image of Holy Mary of Perpetual Help. This is surprising in view of the fact that almost every church in Rome claimed a miraculous Madonna.

The pilgrims who visited the shrine of Perpetual Help came from all corners of the world and from all walks of life—Cardinals, bishops and priests, princes and kings, humble day laborers and wealthy landowners, sinners and saints, men and women and children. They came individually and in groups to tiny San Matteo's.

In 1715 a Jesuit preacher, Father Carocci, sponsored visits to the most renowned sanctuaries in Rome. Each week a crowd of Romans together with out-of-town pilgrims assembled in some church, and there Father Carocci would preach a sermon about the Madonna it contained. On August 31st of that year San Matteo's was the scene of a lengthy and most interesting sermon about the history and meaning of the Perpetual Help picture.

During the three century period of Mary's sojourn in San Matteo's, twenty cardinals, among them learned scholars and diplomats, had this church as their title. They and their retinue of bishops and priests came occasionally to the shrine.

Men's hearts are still the hearts of pilgrims, and Mary's shrines are still the magnet which lures their hearts. For this record of yesterday could be rewritten as a chronicle of today.

"I Go — But I Shall Return"

June 3, 1798, is a day long to be remembered in the annals of the ignominy which clouds the joyous history of Eternal Rome! On that day the French General Massena, military governor of "Free Rome," commanded that thirty Roman churches be destroyed "for strategic reasons." As the lips of the Roman faithful murmured that litany of thirty Saints, they must have repeated the name of the Madonna's chosen shrine, the "Chiesa di San Matteo." The Church of San Matteo, humble, secluded, in a remote section of Rome, tiny as a chapel, its floors worn white by countless pilgrims' feet, must be destroyed as an obstacle to military power!

Pious people suspected that this day would come to crown the impiety of the past few years. They recalled the signs and warnings which the Blessed Virgin Mary had given them in 1796, two years previously. At that time, as they gathered about the shrines of Mary, they noticed that the eyes of Our Lady in her pictures would move, almost as if she were trying to signal them a message. They were puzzled and surprised at first, and wondered whether their imaginations were becoming too active. Could they be deceived? But thousands of them saw it, the merely curious as well as the pious, and the churches were crowded with those who came to see the Madonna move her eyes. The people discussed the event among themselves and decided without hesitation that the whole affair must be a miracle. However, the Perpetual Help Madonna in distant San Matteo's did not move its eyes, though a vigil was kept before it during all the day and even into the night. But did not this Madonna always seem so sad?

When the French armies, led by the young and haughty Napoleon Bonaparte, invaded the Papal States during that same 1796, the people realized that this was the event about which the Queen of Rome had graciously tried to warn them. Their beloved Rome, center of Christendom, was in peril. Again they began to insist upon the "miracle" and urged all to accept its warning. When Pope Pius VI heard from those about his throne that the people spoke about the Madonna's moving eyes, he did not laugh and dismiss the tale as a fable, but instead he commissioned Cardinal Julius Maria della Somaglia to investigate. After a thorough inquiry and examination of the case of twenty-six Roman Madonnas, the Cardinal agreed with the previous decision of the people, and on February 28, 1797, the Holy Father proclaimed the event miraculous, and signed a declaration to that effect.

Not two weeks before, on February 17, the Pope with that same hand had been forced to affix his signature and to give a reluctant approval to the humiliating terms of the Peace of Tolentino. To preserve the integrity and prestige of the Papal States, the Vicar of Christ was obliged to make concessions of territory and rights to the French upstart, Napoleon.

After that, things happened quickly. Mary had given her warning, and terrible days were to come. Until now Rome had been spared the humiliation of enemy rule. A year later, in February, 1798, the French General Berthier, at the head of an army elated by constant success, marched into the Eternal City and proclaimed the "Free

Roman Republic." Three days later, on February 20th, Pope Pius VI, weary of war and tired by the burdens of his rule, fled in disguise to Siena. Eventually the French captured him there and led him into exile and imprisonment in Valence, France, where he died on August 29, 1799.

Shortly after Berthier "freed" Rome, he was replaced by General Massena, cruel, heartless, anti-religious. Massena's edict destroying thirty Roman Churches was meant to show his self-assumed power, his hatred of religion, and also to be a threat of worse things to come unless his every gesture were obeyed.

The setting sun on that grim June day watched the busy monks at San Matteo's load a cart with eight marble statues and some ornate columns. These they pulled and dragged along the Via Merulana to St. John Lateran's, Rome's Cathedral. At the same time the growing evening shadows enveloped another silent group of monks hurrying along the block in the opposite direction, toward Sant' Eusebio, the church and convent left vacant by the Celestine Fathers. They were taking the Madonna of Perpetual Help into exile and oblivion.

Not Rome, however, but a mere corner of it was Perpetual Help's home—the site of San Matteo's, whose walls would soon be level with the dust. And as she sped into exile, the wind seemed to whisper a promise from its Queen: "I go—but I shall return."

Queen in Exile

In the damp, dust-covered community room of the monastry attached to the Church of Sant' Eusebio, half a mile up the Esquiline from San Matteo's, the Augustinian Prior announced his decision to return to Ireland to the monks gathered before him. Most of them were Irish refugees who had come to Rome to escape unjust persecution. But the very scourge they wanted to avoid had caught them even in the center of Christendom. Irreligion had entered the Eternal City with the invading French armies and found fertile soil for growth and spread in the hearts of many Italian natives.

To the Augustinians formerly located at San Matteo's permission was given to return to their native land. A few accepted. Father Philip Crane, the Prior, was one who made that choice, and before his death he achieved the distinction of ruling over the entire Irish Province of his Order. He was accompanied by several others, one

of whom, Father William Doyle, worked with great success as a missionary in Ireland.

The majority of the monks, however, recalled that they had chosen Rome as their home, and they insisted on remaining in the land of their adoption. Most of these were sent to Sant' Agostino, the principal church and monastery of their order. In their number was an Italian lay brother, Augustine Orsetti, who had taken his vows at San Matteo's and who was one of the few Italians in that Irish community. Later his testimony had much to do with the rediscovery of Our Lady's picture.

The remainder of the San Matteo monks took up their home at Sant' Eusebio. The church and the huge monastery had not been used for a long while and were badly in need of repair and thickly coated with dust and cobwebs. Its former occupants were the Celestine Fathers, an order which no longer fulfilled the purpose for which it was founded and consequently was left to die a natural death of extinction. No new members could be admitted, and those who still lived were given permission to join any other religious congregation. Its monasteries had been surrendered to other religious institutes or had been taken over by the Pope. When Pope Pius VI learned of the danger impending upon San Matteo's, he assigned this church and monastery to the Augustinians.

There, as we have seen, they carried the picture of Our Lady of Perpetual Help, not in solemn procession with an escort of prelates and clergy and a throng of singing and praying people, but silently and stealthily in the quiet of the night. It is not known whether the picture was placed in the church or in the monastery chapel, or whether it was hidden somewhere in the house.

Meanwhile visitors to the site of Mary's former shrine gazed only upon ruins. In his letter of December 23, 1801, entitled "Pastor of the Flock of Christ," Pope Pius VII lamented the wanton destruction of more than thirty Roman churches by order of the French General Massena, and he thus describes the devastation at San Matteo's: "The Church of San Matteo was so utterly uprooted from its very foundations that not only was worship in it discontinued but hardly the slightest vestige of it could be found."

In vain did pious pilgrims search the moss-covered ruins for a trace of the picture. They could not find it. They presumed that it had been burned or hacked to pieces by the godless wreckers. Perhaps

the more hopeful envisioned a miracle in which Mary sent her angels to carry it to a place of safety. Few if any seem to have been aware of its real refuge, the Church of Sant' Eusebio on the Esquiline.

Mary's stay on the Esquiline lasted for another twenty years, during which time she was reverenced only by a few faithful monks. Then once again she had to seek another place of exile.

Since the house at Sant' Eusebio was exceptionally large and its community very small, the Pope, in 1819, assigned the Jesuits to that place and gave to the Irish Augustinians in its stead the small church and convent of Santa Maria in Posterula, far across the city on the banks of the Tiber.

At one time this church also had belonged to the Celestine Fathers. Its name—"in Posterula" or "at the little gate"—carries a reference to the fact that it was situated close to the small gates in the wall of Honorius along the Tiber. Because the banks of the Tiber have been built up and changed, the monastery and church have disappeared.

To this location the Irish Augustinians brought the Perpetual Help Madonna in 1819. But because there was a picture of Our Lady in the church, Perpetual Help was given a place of honor in the monastery chapel. Here Mary lived in a solitude as unbroken as that of Nazareth. No longer was her picture the gathering place of her clients, only a few of whom now knew her whereabouts.

Mary remained in Santa Maria in Posterula until 1865. Very often the sixty-seven years the Perpetual Help picture spent in exile are named its "Babylonian Captivity." For this period resembles the seventy years which God's chosen people, the Israelites, spent along the banks of the Euphrates in Babylon, sighing and pleading ardently for deliverance from their enemies.

The malice of enemies of religion, with the permission of divine Providence, had driven Mary from her chosen home in the church located between the two great basilicas of St. Mary Major and St. John Lateran. But God looked upon the humility of his handmaid, and led the Queen from exile into the glory that He promised would be hers at all times.

Memory Carves a Furrow

While the Irish Augustinians were at San Matteo's, some Italians joined their community. One of these, Augustine Orsetti, took the habit as a lay brother; that is, he entered the religious order to do the humdrum daily duty of house cleaning and manual labor. Not much information has been preserved about this brother beyond the fact that he was an Italian: yet, in keeping with her own spirit of humility, Mary chose him as a chief providential means of bringing her picture out of its man-imposed exile.

Brother Augustine, known to his Irish and Italian confreres as Fra Agostino, used to spend much of his free time before the picture of Perpetual Help when, as a novice and as a young religious, he saw it above the high altar of San Matteo's. He studied and memorized the history of the picture as he found it indicated on a wooden tablet hanging in a corner of the sanctuary, and he drank deeply of its mystical meaning.

Then without warning came the fateful day in 1798 when San Matteo's was consigned to destruction by the French. Where Brother Augustine was sent from there is not known, but we can be certain that, without complaint, he gathered together the few belongings which religious poverty had permitted him to use, and hastened to his new post, like Mary hurrying to the hill country to visit her Cousin Elizabeth because such was God's holy will.

In 1840 Brother Augustine was a member of the community attached to the Church of Sant' Agostino in Rome. His stay at the principal monastery of his order was quite brief, and in the early 1840's he was transferred to Santa Maria in Posterula. More than forty years had gone by since he had seen Perpetual Help—long years spent in untiring service of his Queen.

Brother Augustine's first visit, upon his arrival at Santa Maria, was to the community chapel. Above the high altar he saw his Madonna —the Madonna of San Matteo's and of Brother Augustine. His happiness was inexpressible. It was like a meeting of old friends after long years of separation, like a soldier missing in action being found again.

The duty of caring for the sacristy was given to Brother Augustine. Besides preparing the vessels and vestments for daily Mass, he had to clean the chapel and dust its pictures and images.

Then at length toward the close of the 1840's a young student came often to serve holy Mass. Brother Augustine had seen and trained many altar boys in his long life, but few found such a warm spot in his heart's affections as Michael Marchi. To young Michael the Brother pointed out the picture and its beauty and antiquity.

"See that picture, Michael?" he often would say. "It's old—very old —it used to be in the Church of San Matteo. Remember it!" This repeated admonition remained in the youthful memory of Michael Marchi. Within a few years it would bring the picture back to glory.

In 1852 Brother Augustine was transferred to the Community at Bracciani. There in that same year or in 1853 he died at the age of eighty-six. Like the prophet Simeon he could close his eyes in peace, because he had fulfilled his life's work. He had kept alive the story of Perpetual Help.

General Massena destroyed the Church of San Matteo. Perhaps he was powerful enough to turn all of Rome into a shambles had he so desired. But, for all his might, he could not tear the memory of a Madonna from the heart of a humble lay brother.

The Redemptorists Come to Rome

Before continuing the historical study of the Madonna of Perpetual Help, we must make a slight digression. In the unsearchable plans of God's providence, the religious society known as the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer, or the Redemptorist Fathers, was destined to play a leading role in bringing Mary's picture out of exile into a new and wondrous glory. It would be out of place to relate here the interesting history of the Redemptorists. Some salient facts are necessary, however, especially those which narrate the founding of the Church of Sant' Alfonso in Rome, since this was to be the privileged successor of San Matteo's as the shrine of Our Mother of Perpetual Help.

The Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer was founded in 1732 by the fervent devotee of Our Lady, St. Alphonsus Maria de' Liguori, for the purpose of leading to heaven not only the ignorant, abandoned goat herders in the Kingdom of Naples, but the most abandoned souls anywhere in the world.

Italy in the eighteenth century was not a united nation. The central portion, with its capital in Rome, was known as the Papal States and was under the power of the Pope. To the south, toward the toe of Italy's boot, stemming from the beautiful harbor city of Naples, was the Kingdom of Naples, which, together with the Island of Sicily, was ruled by the king of Naples.

At the time of St. Alphonsus the Kingdom of Naples was tainted with the tenets of regalism: that is, the king claimed exemption from all other authority and looked upon himself as supreme, even in matters of religion. Such "sacristy kings" claimed the power to appoint bishops and pastors and to approve or disapprove religious orders.

Because of his political weakness, the Pope often had to cater to the wishes of these rulers in matters of discipline and policy—for, no matter what the consequences, there could be no question of catering in things pertaining to dogmas of faith or moral law.

In this unsettled period St. Alphonsus founded the Redemptorists. For a while it seemed as if the work of the new congregation would be limited only to the Kingdom of Naples, but aided by his keen knowledge of church and civil law, the Saint established beachheads in the Papal States, small foundations from which the Redemptorist Fathers and Brothers could invade the world for Christ.

These houses in the Papal States, however, became a source of headaches and heartaches to the Saint in his old age. They brought about a rift in the congregation so great that for some years there were two Congregations—one under the presidency of Father Francis de Paola in the Papal States, the other in Naples with St. Alphonsus as Rector Major. But God made use of this unfortunate breach to establish the first Redemptorist house in Rome. St. Alphonsus disapproved of founding a monastery in Rome because, in his sight, this savored of ambition, while Father de Paola spent all his efforts towards acquiring such a foundation.

In 1783 Father de Paola purchased the old Carmelite Church of San Giuliano ai Monti, on the Esquiline near Santa Maria Maggiore and Sant' Eusebio and San Matteo, places whose names have a familiar ring in the ears of those who know the story of the picture of Our Lady. San Giuliano's, however, fell into the custody of the French in the same invasion of Rome which resulted in the destruction of San Matteo's, leaving the Redemptorists with the necessity of seeking new headquarters in the Eternal City.

Although the division which had made the Redemptorists two Congregations was somewhat healed after the death of St. Alphonsus, there remained the scars and wounds of compromise. The head of the Congregation, the Father Rector Major, resided in Naples, while a Father Vicar General, with powers in some instances greater than those of the Rector Major, governed the rest of the Congregation. There were consequently quarrels and bickering, and the rift between the Neapolitans and the rest of the Redemptorists alternately healed and deepened, according to the expediencies of the time.

Toward the middle of the nineteenth century, however, the power of the Neapolitan king began to wane. At the same time the prestige of the Pope increased, and he felt strong enough to demand that religious societies whose scope was world-wide should have headquarters in Rome, the Eternal City, the center of Christianity.

Despite interference from Naples, the Redemptorists spread into the entire world. St. Clement Hofbauer had carried the fame and influence of the Congregation into Poland and Austria and the German states. It became known in England and Ireland; it grew in Belgium and France, where it combatted heresy and anticlericalism. In 1832, one hundred years after the foundation of the Congregation, the first pioneer Redemptorists landed in the United States, and by 1850 their numbers had grown sufficiently to make America a province distinct from the provinces of Europe.

Due to this rapid spread, Pope Pius IX, the intrepid Pio Nono, in 1853 commanded Father Rudolph Von Smetana, the Vicar General of the Redemptorists outside of Naples, to establish a general house in Rome and there to hold a meeting or general chapter which would endeavor to settle the differences between the Neapolitans and the rest of the Congregation.

Little did the Pope realize that his decree was eventually to make the Redemptorists custodians of the Madonna of Perpetual Help. For as they cast about for a site for their new motherhouse, Divine Providence led them close to the ruins of old San Matteo's—to a location which fitted perfectly the destination Mary herself had chosen for her picture: "Between St. Mary Major's and St. John Lateran's."

Homeward Bound

The Eternal city was crowded with churches. Most of them had their daily throngs of visitors, but some were tumbling into ruins while others had been abandoned for various reasons. Among these latter Father Von Smetana sought a motherhouse for the Redemptorists. However, he could not give too much personal attention to the matter. His own residence was at Alt-Oetting in Bavaria, quite a distance from Rome, and urgent affairs of the Congregation kept him close to his desk. For this reason he sought someone to tend to the matter in his stead and by letter made known his anxiety to those in his charge.

When Father Edward Douglas, an English Redemptorist, learned of his superior's plight, he volunteered from his family fortune a sum of money to pay for the new home. Father Von Smetana not only was delighted with this offer, but he chose his English confrere as his agent in securing the new property.

Father Douglas was in Limerick, Ireland, preaching a mission when he received a letter from his superior calling him to Alt-Oetting.

At Alt-Oetting, Father Douglas again renewed his offer of a money-gift and discussed with Father Von Smetana the qualities of the monastery and church which he should seek.

On December 3rd, 1853, he set out for Rome, armed with the blessing of his superiors, the prayers of his fellow religious, and an unbounded trust in God.

Before continuing the narrative of Father Douglas' adventures in Rome and how Divine Providence directed him to purchase a site which would eventually bring the Perpetual Help Madonna into the care of the Redemptorists, it will be worthwhile to give a brief summary of Father Douglas' life, especially since he was one of God's chosen instruments in bringing Our Lady's picture out of exile.

Edward Douglas was born in Scotland of parents who were both wealthy and religious. His father had extensive holdings in the West Indies, and from these the family derived financial independence. While Edward was still a young boy, his father died and left to him the entire family fortune, with the one condition that he always support his mother.

After his earlier education young Douglas decided to round off his culture at Oxford University. He wanted to be a minister in the Church of England, to which he and his relationship belonged, but events which occurred during his college days led him into the Catholic Church and eventually to the priesthood.

In the late 1830's Edward Douglas accompanied two of his Oxford friends, John Henry Newman and Robert Coffin, on a pilgrimage to the Holy Land. None of these young men was satisfied with his religious affiliations. Conviction had slowly given way to doubt, and they were casting about for the truth. In fact, it was on the return voyage that John Henry Newman wrote his inspirational poem, "Lead Kindly Light." On the homeward journey the three companions took separate routes, and Douglas visited Rome—little realizing that this journey was for him the threshold of conversion.

Every visitor to Rome goes to the Basilica of St. Peter, the largest church in the world. Douglas chose Trinity Sunday, May 26, 1839, for his visit. He found the church thronged with people acclaiming the canonization of St. Alphonsus Maria de' Liguori, the founder of the Redemptorists, and of Father Jerome Francis, a Jesuit, who in his declining years had, like a second Simeon, taken the infant Alphonsus de' Liguori into his arms and prophesied that the baby would be a Bishop and an old man and a Saint.

It was raining that Sunday, and Douglas had an umbrella with him when he entered St. Peter's. Seeing what he thought was a handy closet, he placed his umbrella within it during the services and his consequent sight-seeing tour. When, hours later, he returned to the supposed closet, he found it locked. It was a confessional in charge of a Franciscan monk, who locked it to save it from the curiosity and abuse of pilgrims and visitors.

Fortunately the umbrella was an heirloom given him by his father and therefore precious to Edward Douglas. Otherwise the indignant young millionaire would not have inquired so earnestly how he could recover what he could easily replace. His attachment to his umbrella led him to a Franciscan monk with whom he began to discuss religion. A chance meeting developed into a friendship and this in turn led Edward Douglas, within a few years, into the Catholic Church. Soon his former friends joined him in the faith. Robert Coffin became a Redemptorist and Bishop of Southwark, while John Henry Newman died a Cardinal.

From conversion to priesthood was not a long voyage for Edward Douglas. As a young priest he said Mass at the tomb of St. Alphonsus in Nocera de' Pagani. There he recalled the events climaxed by his reception into the Church, and there resolved to be a Redemptorist missionary. Providence thereby prepared him for the task imposed on him by Father Von Smetana.

To return to our narrative, when Father Douglas reached Rome, he found about a dozen locations open to him. Some he set aside at once because they were in a swampy and unhealthy section of the city, or because they exceeded the price-range which he had offered and which his superiors had approved. At least six churches and monasteries were open to him, but the hand of Providence intervened to keep him from any purchase. When he made a down payment, the offer of sale was revoked. When he hurried across the city to inspect some site, someone else had reached there an hour before him and closed the transaction. Thus it went for several months until he found an ideal site for Redemptorist headquarters at Villa Caserta, the Roman estate of Duke Michael-Angelo Gaetano.

Hastily he informed Father Von Smetana that this estate was for sale. Father Douglas was willing to pay for it from his paternal inheritance, and in addition to give funds towards a church. The transaction was completed and in 1854, the Redemptorists became possessors of a huge estate with a large house, barns, and livery stables, a luxurious garden and space sufficient for a dozen churches.

Villa Caserta was on the Esquiline Hill, along the Via Merulana. The property was shaped like a triangle, at the base of which lay the estate—and at whose tip were the ruins of a church.

As Father Douglas inspected his property and noticed the ruins, he did not realize that about fifty years before they had been the church of San Matteo, the shrine of the Madonna of Perpetual Help. She was gone now—into exile—but she had promised to come home!

Mary's Shrine is Built

Before the new occupants of Villa Caserta could devote time to digging and exploring ruins, they had to take steps to fulfill the wishes of the Holy Father, Pope Pius IX. Villa Caserta was remodeled; from the luxurious home of a prince it was turned into a monastery for monks bound by the vow of poverty. By spring of 1855 this trans-

formation was affected, and the former mansion was ready to house a religious community.

On April 26, 1855, the General Chapter or assembly commanded by the Pope was opened, and it remained in session until July 20th. During the proceedings the young French Provincial, Father Nicholas Mauron, was chosen by the other twenty-six delegates to the assembly as Rector Major or Superior General of the Redemptorists.

After the chapter, work was at once begun on the new church of Sant' Alfonso on the Via Merulana. A location next to the Villa was selected. For the second time Father Edward Douglas became the saving angel of the Redemptorists. Since the Congregation's treasury was empty, he gave money toward the new edifice. Early in 1856 the roof was finished, and the building was immediately put into use for Mass and other divine services.

Meanwhile the Fathers began inquiring into the history of their famous property. Although the site itself once contained the Esquiline Villa of the Roman patrician Maecenas, the patron of the poet Virgil, the ruins of that huge estate were long buried and forgotten. The estate bought by the Redemptorists had been built toward the close of the seventeenth century as the residence of Cardinal Francis Nerli, whose titular Church was the neighboring San Matteo's. Renowned as a shrewd diplomat and as papal Secretary of State, Cardinal Nerli is also referred to by one of his contemporaries, the Jesuit Father Carocci, as the Maecenas of literary men. Not only was the Cardinal himself a noted author, but he often called aspiring authors and artists to his villa and encouraged them in their work. Thus he continued the work of the pagan Maecenas who once helped Virgil and Horace.

When Cardinal Nerli died in 1708, he willed his entire estate to serve as an insane asylum, called Sancta Maria de Misericordia—Holy Mary of Mercy. Shortly afterwards it was purchased by Don Antonio Turboli, the Marquis of Pieschici, who in turn sold it, in 1725, to Dom Dominico d'Elena, the agent of the Cajetan family. Michelangelo Gaetano (or Cajetan), Prince of Caserta and Duke of Sermona, revised the estate to suit his princely tastes and renamed it the Villa Caserta.

Somewhere within the Villa Caserta, the prince himself or one of his descendants had a printing press installed. On it in 1802, a compendium of the life of the Venerable Alfonso Maria de' Liguori was printed. Not only was this one of the earliest biographies of the

Saint, compiled shortly after his death, but it was, so to speak, his claim on the property where, half a century later, a church would be erected in his honor.

All these things the Redemptorists learned while they thumbed dusty tomes and crumbling documents, but more important discoveries were soon to follow. In 1859 Father Edward Schwindenhammer, the Chronicler General of the Redemptorists, discovered some documents telling of a renowned image of Our Lady which used to be at San Matteo's; excitedly he told the community about his discovery. Then Father Francis Xavier Reuss recalled that he had seen a picture of Our Lady painted on one of the ruined walls around San Matteo's. Was this the picture—or was there yet another?

A Sermon Someone Remembered

The Fathers of Sant' Alfonso were excited. But their excitement could no longer be contained when Father Michael Marchi revealed that he not only had seen the picture itself but also knew its name and its present location.

Michael Marchi was a native of Rome, born on September 29, 1829. In 1855, the very year in which Redemptorist headquarters were established in Rome, he knocked at the door of the monastery and begged to be admitted as a member. He was given a trial, and on March 25, 1857, he promised perpetual service to God as a Redemptorist by pronouncing the holy vows of religion. Then he continued his studies until his ordination on the feast of the Guardian Angels, October 2, 1859.

It was shortly after his ordination that Father Michael Marchi told the eager Fathers at Sant' Alfonso about his acquaintance with the miraculous picture. Its name, he remarked, was the Madonna of Perpetual Help, and it was in the chapel of the Augustinian monastery of Santa Maria in Posterula. There he had seen it often during the years 1850 and 1851 when, as a young college student, he had served Mass in the chapel.

Several years passed by, during which the thought of Mary's picture yielded to more urgent matters. Then, however, the story of the picture of Our Lady of Perpetual Help once again came to the fore in a most surprising way.

During 1862 and 1863 a renowned Jesuit preacher, Father Francis Blosi, delivered each Saturday a series of sermons on some famous picture of Our Lady honored in Rome. To the audience assembled at the Gesu Church in Rome, where these sermons were given, he told, on February 7, 1863, the story of the Madonna of Perpetual Help. His eloquence seemed to reach its height on this particular occasion.

"I am going to speak to you today," he told his listeners, "about a certain picture of Our Lady which was once famous for its miracles, but which has shown no signs of its existence for seventy years, no doubt because, for all that I know, it is now lying neglected in some private home, without public veneration and without the immense gathering of the faithful to which it had grown accustomed in centuries gone by."

He next described the picture and some of its early history, including Our Lady's choice of the location for her picture.

"God grant," the priest continued, "that among this large concourse of Christian people listening to me there may be someone who is aware of the present location of this picture. If so, let him make known to the one who has had it in his possession for seventy years the precious desire of the Mother of God, so that, touched to the heart on account of his ill-advised deed, he will have the picture placed once again for public veneration in some church built between the Esquiline and the Celian Hills."

Finally the preacher reached his inspiring and oratorical conclusion. "Who knows whether the discovery of this picture has not been reserved for our own day—whether she who has wished to be called our 'Perpetual Help' has not perhaps added to this fact (of the picture's discovery) the gift of universal peace! Happy are those who can cooperate in such a work!"

When the Redemptorist community at Sant' Alfonso heard of Father Blosi's sermon, their enthusiasm was again aroused. For their church was located close to the site of old San Matteo's, and thereby it suited perfectly the shrine Our Lady herself had once chosen. Father Michael Marchi was again called on to give his story of the picture and of its hidden sanctuary in an Augustinian monastery.

Hastily the community brought the good news to the Most Reverend Father Nicholas Mauron, the highest superior of the Redemptorists,

who also resided at Sant' Alfonso. In a saintly way Father Mauron cautioned prudence. He first made the facts known to Father Blosi and asked where he had found the story he had related in his sermon. The Jesuit graciously replied that he had learned of the Perpetual Help picture from a book published in 1729.

Besides submitting this information, Father Blosi sent the hand-written copy of his own sermon to the Fathers of Sant' Alfonso. But instead of hastening to claim the picture, Father Mauron commanded the Fathers to pray for guidance. This they did for almost three years, until December, 1865, when the final action was taken which brought the Madonna back to its home on the Esquiline Hill.

With Father Michael Marchi, Father Mauron obtained an audience with the Holy Father, Pope Pius IX, on December 11th. Eagerly the two priests unfolded to the Vicar of Christ what details they knew of the history of Our Lady's picture. They emphasized above all Our Lady's desire that her picture should be enshrined in the church between St. John Lateran's and St. Mary Major's. The Redemptorist Church of Sant' Alfonso answered that description, since it had been erected a short distance from Mary's former shrine at San Matteo's.

The Pope listened intently to their enthusiastic recital. Then he asked if they had put this story into writing. Father Mauron at once produced a document which Father Marchi had written and signed, under oath, on the feast of the Immaculate Conception a few days before.

The Pope opened the paper.

"I, Michael Marchi," he read, "a Roman and a professed priest of the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer, attest under oath the statements which follow in regard to the picture of the Madonna of San Matteo in Merulana, known as 'Perpetual Help.'

"1. For thirteen years and more, I knew a professed Augustinian lay Brother, named Brother Augustine Orsetti, of Lucca, who died in Bracciano in 1852 or 1853—just a few months after he had left this beloved city of Rome—at the advanced age of eighty-six years or even older. In his early youth (as he frequently told me) he received the habit of the hermits of St. Augustine in the house of San Matteo in Merulana, where he pronounced his vows, and he was a subject there in the last years of their stay in that most sacred place.

"2. From this Brother I heard over and over again that this picture had been held in highest veneration, and that every year a solemn feast was celebrated in its honor.

"3. One year, on the occasion of this feast, the following striking incident took place. The decorator who adorned the church for this great solemnity cast an avid glance at the votive offerings and other precious objects, presented through the piety of the faithful, which embellished the sacred Image. This unscrupulous man made good use of the fact that he was alone in the church, despoiled the Image of all its treasures, and walked out as was customary at the end of work without anyone becoming suspicious. But when he reached the Madonna dei Monti near the Via de' Serpenti, he was unable to go any farther; for whichever street he took, he always found himself turned toward San Matteo's, and many times he tried unsuccessfully to go toward the Forum of Trajan. At last the miserable fellow (I do not know exactly whether out of sorrow for his sacrilege or because forced by necessity) returned to San Matteo's, thoroughly afraid and astonished at such a miracle, and restored everything which he had robbed from this holy Image. The religious who were guardians of this precious object wept for joy and praised God and the most Blessed Virgin for the prodigy.

"4. This good Brother always said to me in a somewhat mysterious manner and with a note of anxiety, especially during the years 1850 and 1851, these exact words: 'Know my Michael, the Madonna of San Matteo is that which hangs there in the Chapel: I'm not trying to deceive you. . . . It certainly is! Have you understood me, my dear Michael? it was miraculous!' . . . and other similar things. (This Brother was at the time almost totally blind.)

"With regard to myself, I must say in all truth that I had no thought of being a religious; and I hardly knew of the existence of the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer.

"5. Moreover, I can say about this venerated Picture of the Madonna of San Matteo, called Perpetual Help, that from my childhood until the time when I entered the Congregation, I have seen it always above the altar of the inner chapel of the Monastery of the Augustinian Fathers belonging to the Irish Province, called Santa Maria in Posterula; there it hangs without any cult, without any kind of ornament, and as it were abandoned, without even a lighted candle before it and saddest of all, full of dust and dirt. I have served many Masses there, and I have gazed upon it many times with fondest attention.

"At the present time I have no other desire than that of seeing it placed at once in the location which the most Blessed Virgin so greatly desired, as she herself told that innocent young girl—namely, that this venerable Picture of hers be placed between the Esquiline and the Celian Hills."

The Holy Father, whose tender love for our Blessed Mother shone forth from his earliest years and had prompted him to define Our Lady's Immaculate Conception eleven years previously, could not resist such a plea which seemed to come from the lips of Mary herself. Without hesitation he pushed aside all the formalities which usually are associated with papal decisions. Using his supreme dominion over Church property and his authority over all Christians, he took the piece of paper on which Father Marchi had written his account and in his own hand, wrote on the reverse side:

"December 11, 1865

"The Cardinal Prefect of the Propaganda will call the Superior of the little community of Santa Maria in Posterula, and will tell him it is Our will that the Image of the most holy Mary, of which this petition treats, be returned between St. John's and St. Mary Major's; but with an obligation on the part of the Superior of the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer to substitute another suitable picture.

"Pope Pius IX."

Rome had spoken; the case was closed. The Mother of Perpetual Help had come home after her years of exile.

The Home-Coming

With light and eager step Fathers Michael Marchi and Ernest Bresciani hurried across the city of Rome, in the early morning of January 19, 1866, to the Augustinian Monastery of Santa Maria in Posterula. This was the date that had been chosen for Mary's home-coming.

While the Augustinians regretted parting with their beloved Madonna, they rejoiced that Our Lady would once again receive the honor she deserved, at the site which she herself had chosen almost four centuries previously. According to the Pope's command, the Redemptorists still retained the obligation of giving a substitute picture

to the Augustinians; the monks would be satisfied with nothing less than a careful copy made from the original, and this was delivered to them shortly afterward.

At Sant' Alfonso the entire community was awaiting the return of their two confreres, and they were at the door to greet them. Their nervous fingers opened the bundle; and after a hasty prayer before their Madonna, they began to inspect the picture more minutely.

They found that time had been kind to the ancient picture. Though it was at the very least four centuries old, the colors were still bright and fresh; only a slight section of Our Lady's right sleeve had notably faded, and worms had eaten into a small portion of the reverse side of the picture which was painted on wood. The hand of man, however, had marred and scarred it. In several places gaping nail-holes showed how crudely the picture had been held in its previous shrines. At one time the nails must also have held a heavy bejewelled crown upon the heads of the Mother and Child, while a cross-piece of wood on the reverse side of the picture was badly pierced by two thick nails which were still present.

A skilful Polish artist then living in Rome, Leopold Nowotny (or Novodny), was at once engaged to fill up the holes and retouch the picture.

His work was finished towards the close of April, and a solemn procession was scheduled for the feast of Our Lady of Good Counsel, April 26th. This was to be followed immediately by a triduum—three days of prayer and special devotions—from April 27th to 29th. To both of these events the Vicar of Rome, Cardinal Constantine Patrizi, invited all the faithful, and the newspapers headlined the double celebration.

The procession in the afternoon of April 26th was lengthy and pompous. It began at the Redemptorist Convent of Sant' Alfonso and made a huge circuit of the church covering several blocks in each direction. The people of the neighborhood decorated their houses for the feast. Flowers and clinging vines hung in abundance from windows, while banners and flags and bunting draped the walls and roofs.

In the course of the procession Holy Mary of Perpetual Help proved that she still deserved and retained her title after almost seventy years of seclusion and exile. Many striking and several miraculous events were reported. One of them concerns a four-year-old boy who was

at the point of death from a brain ailment and who had been wracked with constant fever for three weeks. His mother in a spirit of faith and confidence gently lifted him from his bed and held him at the open window while the picture passed by their home. "O good Mother," she sobbed, "either cure my son or take him with you into heaven." Within a few hours there was a noticeable improvement in the boy's health and he was pronounced out of danger. His fever gradually diminished, and a few days later he accompanied his mother to offer a votive-candle at the shrine of Perpetual Help.

When the picture at last reached the church of Sant' Alfonso, it was placed upon the high altar. A solemn "Te Deum" of thanksgiving was then sung, and Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament was given by a Bishop. The church was gaily decorated, and the altar was heavy with lighted candles and abundant flowers. After sunset the doorway and outline of the church were brightened by hundreds of burning tapers.

Mary had again come home.

Sing of Her Triumph!

The triduum which followed upon Mary's homecoming to her shrine, April 27 to 29, 1866, was an outstanding success. Each morning Mass was celebrated before the picture by a Cardinal and then, after the recitation of Our Lady's Litany and an appropriate sermon, Benediction of the Most Blessed Sacrament was given by a bishop. Similar services were held each evening, and the Holy Father generously granted special indulgences to all who attended the devotions. The sermons were preached by Father Bernard Bernabei, one of the foremost Redemptorist preachers in Italy; his words of eloquence reached into the very hearts of his hearers. At least twelve hundred persons received Holy Communion during the triduum—an exceptionally encouraging number considering the smallness of the church and the attitude of many Catholic people at that time toward frequent and daily Communion.

Shortly before these days of triumph, on the twenty-first of April, Father Mauron, the Redemptorist Superior General, visited the Vatican Palace and presented Pope Pius IX with a copy of the miraculous picture. This the Pope placed in his own room where he could look at it frequently during the day, but later he had it enshrined in his private oratory so that he, too, might have a refuge from his many

duties and worries. Then on May the 5th in the early afternoon, the Pope without warning paid a personal visit to the shrine to see Our Lady's picture with his own eyes. After he had prayed for a time before the Blessed Sacrament and at the shrine of Our Lady, he entered the sanctuary and ascended the steps of the high altar to study the picture more closely and at his leisure.

With childlike curiosity and interest Pope Pius questioned Father Mauron about the history and cult of the picture. "Oh, how beautiful it is!" he finally remarked. "It is much nicer than the copy which you presented to me." After this brief visit to the shrine, the Holy Father went into the sacristy where he spoke for a while, informally, to the entire Redemptorist community. Before leaving he gave each and all his blessing and said that he left behind him a special blessing for all those who would pray before the shrine of Our Mother of Perpetual Help.

The great triduum in April had left a profound impression upon the people of Rome, especially those living in the "dei Monti" region —the vicinity of the church of Sant' Alfonso. Led by an Italian nobleman, John Baptist Chiocca, and other pious persons of the neighborhood, the people of their own accord asked the Redemptorists to hold another triduum. They promised an even larger attendance than at the previous triduum, and they kept their word. At every service the small church was filled to overflowing. Father Barnabei was again chosen to preach Our Lady's glories, and high dignitaries of the Church gladly added splendor to the functions. The dates chosen were the three opening days of June.

The day after the triduum, June 4th, marked the removal of the picture from the high altar to a new shrine, in the rear of the church to one's left upon entering. Three young German artists then residing in Rome had planned and decorated the beautiful altar. This was the first fruits of their professional life, and in return for the generous display of their time and talents, Mary bestowed on them the smile of success. Two of them, Desiderius Lenz and Gabriel Wueger, later entered the Benedictine Order and founded the now famous Beuron school of art. The third young artist, a man named Sequenz, later painted the murals of the Church of St. Wenceslaus in Prague and was throughout his life an ardent advocate of Christian art.

But a throne at a distance from that of her divine Son on the altar was not appropriate for Mary. Under the skillful direction of a Tyrolean artist, a new marble high altar was erected. Its gothic style

fitted the architecture of the church. A space in the upper center of the altar, with brilliant golden borders, was arranged to receive the picture. Fifteen small wooden panels around the picture portrayed the mysteries of the Rosary, while beneath the altar table was a wood carving of the Last Supper. On the Gospel side was printed a Latin inscription in golden letters: "Brought from Crete to Rome in 1480"; and on the Epistle side: "Restored to veneration by Pius IX in 1866."

As soon as the new high altar was completed, Mary's picture was reverently placed upon it, and the first Mass was celebrated in its presence on March 19, 1871, the feast of St. Joseph, Christ's Protector and Mary's Spouse. There the picture has remained until this day.

Crown of Joy and Glory

Many of us have in Maytime witnessed the ceremony of the crowning of Our Lady. Perhaps we have even joined in the joyous processions during which a statue or a picture of Mary is carried amid the singing of hymns, to be crowned at length with a wreath of flowers.

This ritual is not new. In 1636 the wealthy Italian nobleman, Alexander Sfirzo, Count of Placenta, bequeathed a large sum of money to the Canons of the Vatican Chapter in Rome, for the purpose of crowning with rich and costly diadems certain pictures of Our Lady.

In order to merit this crown, the picture or statue of Mary selected for the honor had to meet three conditions: its cult must be approved by the bishop of the place in which it was located; this cult, moreover, must be ancient—not the fervor of a few years' devotion; and finally, the picture or statue must have a reputation as a divinely chosen instrument of miracles. Only when these three requirements were proved would the Vatican Chapter authorize its crowning.

A year after the picture of Our Mother of Perpetual Help had been restored to public veneration in the Roman Church of Sant' Alfonso, both priests and people of the Esquiline region had petitioned its coronation. They pointed out that the Holy Father, Pius IX, had himself approved its cult, both by ordering the Redemptorists to give it due honor and by coming in person to pray before it. Its three century stay in San Matteo's and its seventy years of exile were proof enough of its antiquity, while its renown for miracles could not be

denied. The Vatican Chapter upon examination could discover no objection to these petitions and at once decided upon the coronation. The date chosen for this gala event was the Sunday within the octave of Corpus Christi, June 23, 1867.

The coronation ceremonies were to be preceded and followed by a triduum—in all, a week of festivities.

These two tridua surpassed in splendor and in attendance the impressive events of the previous year when the picture had celebrated its homecoming. At nine-thirty on Sunday morning, June 23, in a church crowded to the very doors and surrounded by countless people who could not gain admission, the Right Reverend Roger Aloysius Antici-Mattei, Archbishop of Constantinople and Dean of the Vatican Chapter, was celebrant of a solemn pontifical high Mass. After Mass the Archbishop entoned the festive *Regina Coeli, Laetare!* (*Queen of Heaven Rejoice!*), and as the choir continued the chant, the picture was removed from its throne above the altar. The celebrant then blessed the precious golden crowns, each set with twenty-six gems, and while reciting the prescribed prayers, carefully fastened them to the picture, one upon Mary's head, the other upon Our Savior's. Finally the picture was restored to its shrine and a solemn *Te Deum* was sung by all present.

Late the next afternoon, June 24, the feast of St. John the Baptist, the picture was taken from its shrine to be carried in procession through the neighboring streets.

In the windows of the houses which lined the route of the procession were pictures and images of Mary gaudily decked with flowers and surrounded by candles which sparkled like diamonds in the growing dusk. Many houses also displayed flags and streamers, and the people who watched the procession threw flowers upon the rough stone streets.

The remaining days of the triduum brought larger crowds than ever before to the shrine at Sant' Alfonso's. Each evening fireworks pencilled their colored lights across the evening sky, and the thunderous voices of cannons and small bombs echoed the praises of Mary.

At the close of the week's celebration, the name of Mary was spelled in brilliant light against the blue background of the sky, and the people who watched, enthralled as if by a vision, cried out with one voice: "Long live Mary! Long live holy Mary of Perpetual Help!"

"Make Perpetual Help Known"

With the Perpetual Help picture, Pope Pius IX gave the Redemptorist Fathers a command: "Make Our Mother of Perpetual Help known throughout the entire world." In fulfillment of this commission from the Vicar of Christ, the Redemptorists have sponsored any movement which would promote devotion to Our Mother of Perpetual Help.

The favorite form of devotion to Our Mother of Perpetual Help in the United States is the *weekly* or *Perpetual Novena.* This consists of an uninterrupted series of public novena services on one day each week, generally on the day chosen by the Novena Director as best fit for local conditions. A client of Mary can begin his novena at any time and see it through the nine weeks to its conclusion. Tuesday was the day chosen for the weekly Perpetual Help services at St. Alphonsus (Rock) Church in St. Louis, Mo., where this type of novena began about thirty years ago. Thus from the beginning, people spoke of the Perpetual Novena as the "Tuesday devotions" in honor of Our Mother of Perpetual Help.

Novena-goers are familiar with the traditional Perpetual Help service: the congregational singing and praying; the letters of thanksgiving made public for the encouragement of petitioners; the Shrine; the petition box; the Novena blessings and the pointed "Thought for the Day;" the concluding Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament.

It is estimated that at present some 1,500 to 2,000 parishes in the U. S. are currently conducting the Perpetual Help Novena. It has spread throughout the entire world. Since 1949, the services of the Perpetual Novena have been held each Saturday at Sant' Alfonso church in Rome, in the presence of the original Miraculous Image.

In many countries of South America and in Spain, devotion to Our Mother of Perpetual Help centers around the *Supplica Perpetua.* This form of devotion, which originated in 1878 in Santiago de Chile, calls upon the people of a parish to take turns in prayer before the Perpetual Help shrine in church, so that Our Lady's picture will not be left alone. This is similar in manner to perpetual adoration of Our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament.

In 1925 devotees of Our Mother of Perpetual Help in Alsace began the *Gebetswache* or "Prayer-watch." This is like a Marian "holy hour." The members of each *Watch* spend an hour at a time before the picture of Our Mother of Perpetual Help and pray there together.

It would be impractical as well as impossible to enumerate all the forms of devotion to Our Mother of Perpetual Help. Suffice it to say that Our Mother of Perpetual Help is known and loved throughout the entire world.

This is the last chapter of this booklet, but until Judgment Day it will be too early in history to write the final chapter of the story of Mary's favorite Madonna. Meantime devotion to Our Mother of Perpetual Help will continue to enkindle the world.

Appendix: The Archconfraternity

Ireland can claim the glory of forming the first Confraternity of Our Mother of Perpetual Help. In 1868, two years after the picture had been enshrined in Sant' Alfonso in Rome, the people of Limerick organized their powerful sodality to spread devotion to Our Lady of Perpetual Help throughout the length and breadth of the Isle of Saints. The following year witnessed the founding of a confraternity in Roulers, Belgium; the organization was sponsored by the hierarchy of that country, and within a year's time numbered 6400 members.

Because of these and similar attempts to organize leagues of prayer to Our Lady, the most Reverend Father Nicholaus Mauron, the Superior General of the Redemptorists, petitioned the Holy Father, Pope Pius IX, that a pious confraternity in honor of Our Mother of Perpetual Help and under the protection of St. Alphonsus Maria de' Liguori might be established, according to the laws of Holy Church, at Sant' Alfonso's on the Esquiline. The request was granted on May 23, 1871.

The solemn ceremony of the erection of the confraternity took place on June 4, the feast of the Most Holy Trinity, with a solemn Mass and an appropriate sermon. The faithful of Rome showed their appreciation and devotion to Our Lady by enrolling in large numbers, so that there were at least six thousand members on the first anniversary of the new confraternity's existence.

Five years later, on March 10, 1876, the Confraternity at Sant' Alfonso's was given a grant of special indulgences for its members. In order that other devotees of Our Lady throughout the world might share in these spiritual privileges, the Confraternity was erected into an Archconfraternity on March 31 of the same year.

The better to understand what this means, we can draw upon an analogy from our Labor Unions. Besides having its national headquarters, a Union is composed of local units. Unless a local unit is affiliated with union headquarters, it shares in none of the privileges granted to members, though it may have its own limited, local rights. When members join a Union, they enroll in the local unit and thereby participate in the general benefits.

A confraternity is similar to a local unit, while an archconfraternity resembles the union headquarters. The indulgences and other spirit-

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ual blessings granted to the Archconfraternity would now be available to all members of local, parochial confraternities which would affiliate with the headquarters at Sant' Alfonso. And the Catholic faithful could join this richly endowed organization merely by enrolling their names at the nearest affiliated confraternity.

Privileges of Confraternity Members

When the Confraternity of Our Mother of Perpetual Help and of St. Alphonsus was made into an Archconfraternity, all of the confraternities which joined it in accordance with the regulations of church law became sharers in rich spiritual benefits granted to the Archconfraternity. Among these were the following: a plenary indulgence, under the usual conditions for such an indulgence, at the time when anyone joined the Archconfraternity; on the feast of Our Mother of Perpetual Help (celebrated, in memory of the picture's solemn coronation in 1867, on the Sunday before the feast of St. John the Baptist, which occurs on June 24); on the feasts of the Archangels St. Michael (September 29) and St. Gabriel (March 24), because they have a place of honor on the picture; on the feast of St. Matthew, Apostle and Evangelist (September 21), to preserve the memory of the Church of San Matteo, where the picture was venerated for three centuries; on the feast of Our Lady of Good Counsel (April 26), because on this day the picture was solemnly restored to public honor in 1866; on the feast of St. Alphonsus (August 2), or during its octave, because the Saint is the protector of the Archconfraternity; on one day each month when a member would renew the act of consecration to Our Lady; for attendance at the yearly Requiem Mass celebrated for deceased members; and on other occasions.

Besides these, many partial indulgencies have been granted for performing acts of zeal and charity, for prayers at Our Lady's shrine, for participation in the novena devotions, for frequently begging the assistance of the Mother of Perpetual Help. Members share, too, in all the prayers, good works, and mortifications of the priests and brothers of the congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer, and are remembered in a solemn high Mass that is offered each year for all members, living and dead, on the feast of Perpetual Help.

The Archconfraternity is a powerful and certain help to all its members to attain the joys of eternal salvation.

The solemn inauguration of the Archconfraternity of Our Mother of Perpetual Help and of St. Alphonsus was fixed for the feast of

Our Mother of Perpetual Help, Sunday, June 18, 1876. The feast was preceded by a solemn triduum. Once again the interior of Sant' Alfonso's Church was richly decorated with flowers and golden streamers and lights. A huge picture of Our Lady was placed above the door of the church, so that all who passed by or who entered the edifice might be aroused to devotion toward Mary. Each evening a sermon was preached relating the history and the meaning of the picture. The Esquiline had not seen such festive hues since 1870, when Rome and the Papal States were taken from the Pope, who went into voluntary seclusion in the Vatican palace.

On the feast of Our Mother of Perpetual Help, the Church of Sant' Alfonso was thronged for all the Masses, but above all for the solemn Mass at ten o'clock. Earlier that morning, however, a far more notable event had taken place. Within the walls of the Vatican, shut out from the gaze of men, a solemn stamp of approval was given to the feast and to the Archconfraternity of Our Mother of Perpetual Help. For Pope Pius IX, who a few days previously had asked to have his name enrolled as the first in the new Archconfraternity, celebrated in his private chapel the proper Mass in honor of Our Mother of Perpetual Help, which he himself had recently granted and approved.

St. Alphonsus has justly been chosen as the protector of this sodality whose official title is the Archconfraternity of the Blessed Virgin Mary of Perpetual Help and of St. Alphonsus Maria de' Liguori. The picture of Our Lady has its home in the church dedicated to the saint, and it is in the care of the Redemptorist Fathers, the religious family which he founded. St. Alphonsus easily takes a first place among the saints who have in a particular way proved their devotion to Our Lady. Like his patron St. Ildephonse, he was arduous in defending Mary's privileges. Like St. John Damascene, he proclaimed his readiness — and bound himself by vow — to die a martyr in defence of her glory. Like St. Bernard, he preached her praises with eloquent tongue. Like St. Bernardine of Siena, he poured out his heart in loving prayer. The saint's *Glories of Mary* ranks as a best-seller among books about the Blessed Virgin Mary, and the novena prayers in honor of Our Mother of Perpetual Help, recited by so many persons week after week, have been adapted or taken literally from prayers composed by St. Alphonsus.

St. Alphonsus Maria de' Liguori has proved an able protector. Through his prayers and inspiration the Archconfraternity has grown until it now embraces more than five million members of every race and nation.

Duties of Confraternity Members

The requirements for membership in the Archconfraternity of Our Mother of Perpetual Help and of St. Alphonsus are exceedingly simple. No money is required as dues; no special prayers need be said. Any Catholic may become a member, and thereby share in the abundant indulgencies and other spiritual treasures, merely by having his or her name enrolled in the catalog of a Confraternity which is affiliated with the Archconfraternity. Infants and children may be enrolled by their parents or others in charge of them.

If the devotions in honor of Our Mother of Perpetual Help and Our Lady's picture have not been erected in one's parish church, one may become a member of the Archconfraternity by sending one's name to the Director of the Confraternity of Our Mother of Perpetual Help, Liguori, Mo., or to any other Redemptorist monastery or parish.

This simple fact of submitting one's name is the only requirement for membership. But since the purpose of the Archconfraternity is the spreading of devotion to Our Blessed Lady, practices of piety in her honor are recommended to the members.

The first recommended practice is that of making a consecration to Our Mother of Perpetual Help and to St. Alphonsus on the day of one's enrollment in the Archconfraternity. The formula for this consecration will be found on the novena cards and booklets. It should be renewed at least once a month, not merely because rich indulgences may be gained for this practice, but in order to keep aware of the promise to be a faithful servant of Mary, and therefore many local units of the Archconfraternity have the custom of reciting the act of consecration, together with the novena prayers, on the first Tuesday or Wednesday of each month.

As devoted children of Our Mother of Perpetual Help, members of the Archconfraternity will run to her in all their needs, will wear her medal, will have her picture in their homes. They will vie with the zealous St. Alphonsus Maria de' Liguori in promoting the Glories of Mary.

All these practices and devotions, together with many others, are summarized in a document released by the Holy See on the feast of Our Lady's Visitation, July 2, 1876: "The Statutes of the Archconfraternity of the Blessed Virgin Mary of Perpetual Help and of St. Alphonsus Maria de' Liguori." These statutes are in reality a charter

of perfection and of sanctity. Anyone who faithfully fulfills the recommendations found therein may be certain of having true devotion to Our Lady — the devotion which is a pledge of eternal salvation.

The original copy of the Statutes is printed in Latin and Italian. After the title, the formula of the act of consecration is given as a form of enrollment in the Archconfraternity; then follow three chapters which explain the spirit and purpose of the Archconfraternity, devotions which should be performed by the members in order to realize this purpose, and finally other devotions which are mere suggestions and which will deepen one's personal love and zeal for Our Blessed Lady.

Here is the act of consecration to Our Lady and St. Alphonsus, which stands at the head of the statues.

"I ....., desiring to consecrate myself entirely to the service of the ever Blessed Virgin Mary, from whom, after God, I expect all help and assistance in life and in death, unite myself with the members of this pious Archconfraternity which has been erected in honor of our Mother of Perpetual Help. And for this reason I choose as my special protector the glorious St. Alphonsus, that he may obtain for me a true and lasting devotion towards the Blessed Virgin, who is called on by this sweet name. I promise, moreover, to renew my consecration to the Blessed Virgin and St. Alphonsus on the ..... day of every month or on the following Sunday, after receiving the Sacraments of Penance and the Holy Eucharist.

"O Mother of Perpetual Help, receive me as your servant, and grant that I may experience with what maternal care you assist those who are devoted to you. I promise sincerely that I will take care to run to your protection by praying to you in every spiritual and temporal need.

"My protector, St. Alphonsus, obtain for me the grace of an ardent love for Jesus Christ and constancy in invoking the Mother of Perpetual Help."

The Statutes of the Archconfraternity

The following is a literal translation of the statutes of Our Lady's Archconfraternity, taken from the official text issued by the Holy See on the feast of the Visitation, July 2, 1876.

1. The Purpose and the Spirit of the Archconfraternity

We are taught by faith that, without the help of God's grace, we can do no good work which will have value for procuring our eternal salvation. And St. Alphonsus reminds us that it is the marvellous and loving arrangement of God's Providence that no grace is granted to men which does not pass throught the hands of Mary. For she has been appointed by her divine Son Jesus to be the treasure-house and the universal dispenser of all graces, both spiritual and temporal.

As a consequence, it is necessary to have recourse to Mary; and if anyone recommends himself with confidence and perseverance to the best of mothers, he will without fail obtain whatever he asks for. As the holy Doctor St. Alphonsus says: "Just as the body cannot live without breathing, so the soul cannot remain alive unless it runs to and prays to Mary; for through her intercession we shall certainly acquire and retain the divine life of grace."

But now, among all the titles which the faithful use in calling upon Mary, without doubt the most beautiful and the most consoling is that of *Mother of Perpetual Help*. This title is all the more cherished and venerable due to the fact that the Blessed Virgin herself chose it to give us the courage to fly to her with confidence in our every need. Moreover, this title is all-embracing, and points out the immense power with which Mary has been endowed by the Lord as well as the boundless mercy which flows forth from her most bountiful heart. Therefore, by this very title we are taught that there is no time or place or any other circumstance of life in which this good Mother will not be at hand to help us if we have sought her aid by our fervent prayers.

Consequently the purpose of this pious Archcontrafernity is to serve and honor the Queen of Heaven whom we call upon as our Mother of Perpetual Help, and to spread this blessed devotion as far as possible among others, with the assistance of the powerful patronage of St. Alphonsus.

Those who have become members of this Archconfraternity first of all shall invoke the Mother of Perpetual Help in every spiritual necessity, especially in time of temptation and anguish. They shall ask of her the grace never to offend God by sin, the pardon of the sins which they have committed, final perseverance, and above all a great love for Jesus Christ.

Next, they shall call upon the Mother of Perpetual Help even in all their temporal necessities, and with a firm confidence they shall

look to her maternal kindness for protection and for all necessary assistance.

Thirdly, they shall strive to imitate the virtues of the Blessed Virgin, particularly her deep humility, her unspotted purity, her ardent love for Jesus, and her tender charity towards her neighbor. "After Mary has snatched a soul from the clutches of Lucifer and has united it with God," writes St. Alphonsus, "she requires of that soul the imitation of her own virtues; for unless this is done, she will hardly be able to enrich with grace this soul which she sees leading a life so different from her own. Therefore, if we love Mary, we must make every effort to imitate her; for this is the greatest homage which we can offer her."

Fourthly, in order the more easily to obtain the grace of having constant recourse to Mary and of copying her virtues, the members of the Archconfraternity shall honor St. Alphonsus with particular devotion and shall choose him as their special advocate with the Queen of Heaven. Mary certainly looks upon this, her most faithful servant, with a deep love and graciously listens to his prayers. For during his life-time the holy Doctor held a favored position as one of her greatest lovers; he defended with burning diligence the teaching that the intercession of Mary is necessary to all men for eternal salvation; by his preaching and writing he helped to spread devotion to the Blessed Virgin; and lastly, the church in which the picture of Our Mother of Perpetual Help is enshrined is dedicated to him.

Finally, the members of the Archconfraternity shall strive with much zeal and charity to spread far and wide devotion to Our Mother of Perpetual Help, because this is a most effective way of assuring one's eternal salvation. Blessed is he who has instilled into the hearts of others this salutary devotion and has led others to the love and service of Jesus and Mary!

2. Practices of Devotion to be Performed by the Members

At the very outset it must be noted that none of the devotions and exercises of piety recommended in this booklet binds under pain of either mortal or venial sin. Nor is any other condition required for admission into this Archconfraternity than the mere enrollment of one's name on the list of members. However, since the purpose of this Society is to serve and honor Mary under the title of Perpetual

Help, it is necessary that the members have perpetual recourse to her motherly goodness. For what profit would there be if someone, by joining the Archconfraternity, would pretend to be a devoted client of Mary and yet would be unwilling to prove this special service in deed?

Therefore (in order to prove in deed their love for Mary), the members of the Archconfraternity are urgently asked to observe faithfully the following practices:

1. They shall wear around their neck a medal with the image of the Blessed Virgin of Perpetual Help on one side and that of St. Alphonsus on th other.

2. They shall keep in their home a picture of the Blessed Virgin, whom they shall make every effort to honor as the Lady and Protectress of the family, reciting before the image and the picture of St. Alphonsus those prayers which they are accustomed to recite at home.

3. As soon as they arise in the morning, and again before they go to bed in the evening, they shall kneel and say the *Hail Mary* three times in honor of the Blessed Virgin, and the *Glory be to the Father* once in honor of St. Alphonsus; to these they shall add the ejaculatory prayers: "O Mary, Mother of Perpetual Help, pray for me."—"My protector, St. Alphonsus, in all my wants make me have recourse to Mary."

4. Every month, on the day which they have chosen for this purpose, they shall renew the consecration by which they have dedicated themselves entirely to the Blessed Virgin and to St. Alphonsus, and they shall receive Holy Communion, offering it for the intentions suggested in paragraph number 8 below. Those who are priests are requested to offer holy Mass for these same intentions, or at least to include them in a special way in the *Memento*. Moreover, all shall strive to spend this entire day as if it were the last day of their life.

5. They shall celebrate with great fervor the feast of Our Mother of Perpetual Help (which occurs on the Sunday preceding June 24) and the feast of St. Alphonsus (August 2), and this fervent celebration shall include the reception of the Sacraments of Penance and the Holy Eucharist.

6. They shall attend the Mass offered every year for the repose of deceased members of the Archconfraternity, and they shall apply to them the Holy Communion they are to receive on that day. (This Mass is offered on the first day after the feast of Our Mother of Perpetual Help on which Requiem Mass may be celebrated.)*

7. They shall be present at the devotions which, together with an appropriate sermon, are held in the evening on the first Sunday of each month. — Moreover, once a week, or if they live at too great a distance from the church, at least once a month, they shall visit the shrine of Our Mother of Perpetual Help and of St. Alphonsus and there pray for the growth and spread of the Archconfraternity.*

8. Finally, they shall offer to God all their prayers, communions, mortifications, works of charity, and other pious practices for the Church, for the Holy Father and all the members of the Archconfraternity, for the conversion of sinners, for those men who stand most in need of spiritual help, and for the Souls in Purgatory, especially those who belonged to the Archconfraternity.

3. Other Pious Practices Recommended to the Members

In order that the members of the Archconfraternity may enjoy more surely the continued and powerful protection of the Blessed Virgin and may be helped by her perpetually, it is fitting to add here some other pious practices from which each one may choose those which appeal to one's personal devotion, and which are best accommodated to each one's state and condition in life. Such devotions are:

1. To be present at holy Mass daily, in as far as possible; and to attend the devotions held in churches of the Archconfraternity at ten o'clock on Sunday or holy day mornings in honor of Our Mother of Perpetual Help and of St. Alphonsus.*

2. To be present at the visit to the Blessed Sacrament and to the Blessed Virgin Mary. For this visit the prayers and considerations composed for this purpose by St. Alphonsus are read. This visit takes place in the church each afternoon, unless some other devotion has been prescribed.*

*Some of these practices refer to devotions held at Sant' Alfonso in Rome.

3. To attend the tridua and novena held in the church, particularly those in honor of the Mother of Perpetual Help and of St. Alphonsus. Those who cannot go to church should take care to make the devotions at home.

4. To devote at least a quarter of an hour each morning to mental prayer. "Mental prayer," says St. Alphonsus, "is necessary with a moral necessity to obtain perseverance. One who omits mental prayer has little knowledge of his own spiritual miseries and how much he stands in need of prayer in order to resist temptations and to save his soul. As a result, such a man prays only rarely or not at all, and by not praying he loses his soul."

5. To examine one's conscience each evening, to make acts of faith, hope, love, and sorrow, and to recite five decades of the Rosary — all of these in company with one's family. Blessed is that family (exclaims St. Alphonsus) in which this salutary custom is practiced!

6. On feast days to hear a sermon; or, if any circumstance makes this impossible, to read some spiritual book for half an hour, preferably one of the many composed by their protector, St. Alphonsus.

7. Finally, all the members are reminded of those words which our most zealous Doctor, St. Alphonsus, addresses to all Christians: "Among all the devotions to our Blessed Mother, none pleases her so much as frequent recourse to her intercession, asking her help in each and every difficulty — as, for instance, in receiving or giving advice, in dangers, in adversities, in temptations and particularly those opposed to purity. Mary certainly will help us if we have recourse to her by calling on her most holy name in which there is a marvellous power against the devil."

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